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MORAL BEWILDERMENT

THE period between the wars is frequently described as one of disillusion. The peoples of western Europe were suffering, it is said, from decay, moral and intellectual. In the sphere of politics this was visible in widespread loss of faith in the efficiency of democratic forms of government. The arts, it is alleged, reflected the growing sense of the aimlessness of existence and the futility of ideals. Even science no longer held out the hope that by its methods an interpretation would be reached of the ultimate structure of the world. The traditional doctrines both of religion and morality were shaken by the growing influence of the theory that all know ledge was relative and that no judgments could claim absolute validity. There was in short a general loss of the sense of direction and this appeared not only in the sceptical utterances of the intellectuals but in the conduct of the masses of the people which revealed, so it is said, a lack of zest and alertness and of confidence in their own future and the future of civilization itself.[1]

Diagnoses of this kind which pretend to sum up the entire mentality of an age are easily made. By giving prominence to certain tendencies and ignoring others, by assuming causal links between movements which in fact may not be causally connected, in particular by taking the utterances of literary men as reflecting the mental state of the masses of the people it is not difficult to make out a plausible case for any particular theory. But if such diagnoses are easily made they are as easily refuted. Consider the alleged moral decay. There is no proof that doctrines of the relativity of moral judgments are especially characteristic of the present age or are dominant among present day philosophers. There is no evidence that doctrines of this kind necessarily affect the working code of the people who teach it. For philosophical analysis is one thing, actual morality another. There is still less evidence that such doctrines are at all widely accepted by non-philosophers or that they make articulate a widely-diffused belief that the distinctions between right and wrong are ephemeral and arbitrary. To attribute political or economic 'crises' to moral factors mainly is particularly dangerous. The collapse of France for example has often been taken to indicate a wide prevalance of moral and political cynicism or at the least of a state of moral weariness. But careful observers have noted that despite the 'moral Hamletism' of some intellectuals the sources of devotion, enthusiasm and readiness for self-sacrifice had by no means run dry in France. It would be as misleading to attribute the revival of France to a moral renaissance as to explain its collapse as due to a decay of morals. There is no evidence of widespread changes of moral temper and outlook in either direction.

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[1]See *e.g. The Recovery of the West* by Michael Roberts. [Reviewed in *Scrutiny*, Vol. X, No. 4—Ed.].

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There is no reason for believing that the men of this age are lacking in moral fibre. The experience of the two world wars shows that men are no less responsive to ideals or less tenacious of purpose than were men of former ages. The difficulty of dealing with this problem is made evident by the fact that regimes of very different character appear to be equally capable of evoking qualities of the very highest order. Russians and Japanese, Germans and their opponents, have all alike revealed astonishing powers of devotion, readiness for self-sacrifice, indomitable courage and endurance. Are we to conclude that the social systems of these peoples are of equal intrinsic value or are these peoples fighting not for any particular social system but for something much more elemental—the survival of their group?

It is clear that if we attempt to estimate the moral quality of an entire people we set ourselves an impossible task. We must begin by a study of the groups within the people and even then our information is woefully scanty. In Germany, for instance, we can distinguish between the Nazis, their supporters and their opponents. Among the former we can, according to the most plausible accounts, recognize three different groups. There are first the Nazi leaders and their immediate followers. These appear to be moral nihilists. They have made power their end and ruthless violence their instrument. They can talk of justice and reasonableness when it suits them, but this is a mere ruse to be discarded as soon as other methods become available. There are secondly the indoctrinated. Among these there are undoubtedly many who by their training have become as amoral as their leaders, brutal and without any moral scruple. But there are others who perhaps are more correctly described as moral fanatics. They have accepted a set of beliefs which to them is the one true guide to life and which they regard as so precious that by comparison nothing else is of any importance. All ordinary moral standards lose their significance and, in practice, such moral fanaticism leads to acts which cannot be distinguished from those committed by those whom I have called the moral nihilists.

There are thirdly the loyal citizens. These are people who have not abandoned their wonted moral standards but who are accustomed to follow and obey the recognized and accepted authority. Among these is perhaps a large group who are more correctly described as bewildered and apathetic. They find themselves in the grip of forces they cannot control and they follow their leaders for fear lest even worse might befall. In the opposition too no doubt various sub-groups can be distinguished, which need not here be examined. In non-totalitarian countries there are no exact parallels to the amoralists, nor is there any evidence of fundamental moral scepticism among the masses of the people. But there is a good deal of political apathy on the one hand and of moral bewilderment on the other. This bewilderment is not, as it seems to me, evidence of moral decay but rather of moral ferment and it reflects genuine moral difficulties and not merely ignorance or mental confusion.

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The moral malaise of our times is not yet articulate but certain elements in it may, I think, be discerned. To begin with, there is a widespread feeling that the religious authorities have not succeeded in showing how the moral tenets which they teach can be applied to the complex situations of modern life. Consider, for example, the attitude of the churches to war. There are at least three views, for each of which Christian warrant is claimed. There is first the view that war is always sinful and must be absolutely renounced. There is secondly the view which distinguishes between wars which are just and those which are unjust, and here there are wide differences of opinion as to the criteria of just wars. There is thirdly the view of those who think that normally it is a duty of a Christian to obey the orders of his government and therefore he must fight if so commanded, though here some authorities would admit that individuals may feel justified in refusing if they are convinced that the fighting is in a wrong cause. At a conference of Christian Churches held before the war it was clear that those who took part felt overwhelmed by the difficulty of the problem. It was even suggested that the perplexity was 'a sign of the sins in which the members of the Church were implicated'. What they mean is that they are no wiser than other people. Similar illustrations could easily be given from the attitude of Christianity to the problems connected with the institutions of property and economic organization. The fundamental moral principles are perhaps not seriously questioned but their application to complex issues is felt to be vague and uncertain and this shakes belief in their workability. The difficulty cannot be resolved by a separation of zones, one concerned with the individual and the family and the other with public life. For the zones interpenetrate and apathy towards or abstraction from public life must sooner or later, under modern conditions, lead to an enfeeblement of the entire structure of morals.

Another source of moral difficulty is to be traced to the close interweaving of ethical questions with questions of fact. I believe that a larger proportion of the population than in any other previous epoch is now eager for justice in social and economic relations. But the lack of accurate knowledge of the facts involved tends to obscure the ethical aspects of the problem and in particular to suggest greater differences of opinion regarding ethical standards than would exist if the factual issues were more clearly grasped. The believer in 'capitalism' and the believer in a socialized economy are apt to think that they are divided by a difference of view regarding ends and values. But it is perfectly possible that both sides, for example, attach equal value to the full and harmonious development of individual personality, but that each is convinced that the policy advocated by the other would lead to slavery. In such a controversy there are certainly involved ethical questions in the proper sense of the word, for example, the grading and balancing of different kinds of freedom, such as the relative importance of basic security in the conditions of life, the exercise of initiative, the freedom of expression and the like. Such grading involves a

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conception of a hierarchy of values and is thus a proper matter for ethical analysis. But even here questions of fact are involved, since we need to be able to estimate the likely effects of the policy to be followed on each kind of freedom and their effects on each other. Furthermore the difference between the socialists and their opponents turns also on differences of view regarding the motives or incentives of action, the possibility of changing the direction of motives by changes in institutions and the probable effect of different systems of distributing the products of industry on the total produced. These are questions mainly of economics and sociology and not so much of ethics. But people are apt to think they differ about ethics, when in reality the root of the difference may well be due to the obscurity and complexity of the facts and the difficulty of estimating in advance the consequences likely to follow from the line of policy pursued.

A third cause of moral malaise is to be found in the use made of the moral appeal in modern propaganda. The confusions thus arising are very widespread and the source of much bewilderment. Marxist literature for example is infused with moral passion and idealism, while at the same time suggesting that morals like religion are only opium for the people. The contradiction is more blatant in fascist literature. Here appeal is constantly made to justice and reasonableness, while in the same breath the fundamental principles of humanity and justice are dismissed with contempt. Above all, war propaganda, in which both sides claim to be fighting for the highest ideals, cannot but engender a suspicion of insincerity and a tendency to dismiss all ideals as illusions or shadowy epiphenomena of a struggle between forces in their essence non-moral. No doubt, while in the midst of war, most people come to feel that right is on their side. The political disillusion that follows wars is, however, only too apt to revive moral doubts that during a war are latent or suppressed.

A fourth tendency which appears in many forms is a manifestation not so much of moral bewilderment as of moral fanaticism. One of the most alarming things in our time is the demand so frequently made on the Left and the Right for unquestioning faith. In the Nazi writings the word fanaticism has become a term of praise, but the longing for an intensification of certitude, for an assured conviction which will withstand all challenges and be beyond all discussion is by no means confined to the Nazis. We can recognize in this connection types well-known in the study of religious fanaticism. There is the brooding ascetic type, obsessed by his conviction, incapable of tolerating any conflicting ideas, often paranoid, a persecuted persecutor, ready for anything, however cruel. There is secondly, the weak and unstable type, hunting his own doubt in others, the man who cannot believe in himself so long as others doubt him. This type too tends to seek reassurance in exaggerated self-assertion and to overcome his own weakness in cruelty and destructiveness. There is thirdly the excessively loyal, those who as William James puts it, suffer from 'a loyalty carried

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to a convulsive extreme'. Such people tend to idealize the devotion itself and they too may go to any length, of cruelty especially, to avenge a slight, imaginary or real, to their hero or cause. There are others themselves uncertain and incapable of resolute action who admire what they take to be the strength and confidence of the fanatics and are ready to condone in them acts of which they themselves are quite incapable. In times of social confusion all these types come to the surface. The demand for an assured faith which will kill all doubt and inspire speedy action gives the fanatics their chance. The resort to violence is the natural outcome.

We are here concerned not so much with the psychology as with the ethics of violence. We need not consider those who glorify violence as an end itself. But the problem of the limits of the use of force as a means for attaining ends deemed of supreme value is one that deeply troubles many of the younger generation who have no sympathy at all with the romantic view of violence familiar in fascist literature. Do revolutionary ideals justify the use of violent methods deemed to be necessary for their attainment? Has a minority convinced that it is acting for the well-being of the community as a whole the right to impose its will on an indifferent or apathetic or hostile majority? Is there a fundamental difference between the use of force in war and its use in a revolution? These are questions which in different forms are very frequently raised, and they are the more pressing because in the background is a feeling of impatience with the liberal spirit and a longing for decisive action, which may easily pass into the admiration of action as such, characteristic of many fascists. The arguments adduced often imply an unreal separation of ends and means. There are no doubt many forms of conduct in which the two can be clearly distinguished, but in complex social activities the means employed frequently affects the nature of the end sought and means and ends must therefore be considered together for the purposes of ethical evaluation. If force is used to bestow freedom the probability is that the mentality of those who apply the force and of those who suffer from it will be pauperised and that both will be made too unfit to act freely. This is not to say that force can never be rightly used, but merely to suggest that in dealing with the use of force as a means for the attainment of valuable ends attention must be given to the question how far force can attain these ends without distorting their nature or producing consequences incompatible with them. The history of revolutions shows how difficult such questions are to answer. Who can say even in retrospect whether any of them were worth the price and whether the price was necessary. In prospect the problems involved in grading values and in estimating the probable consequences are even more difficult. It is not surprising that they lead to bewilderment, or that refuge from bewilderment is sought in fanaticism.

There is another group of problems which occasion much perplexity. These are connected with the growing realization of the discrepancy between public and private morals. Some philosophers

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indeed have thought that ethically there is a gulf between the two worlds and that states in their relations to one another cannot be judged by the same standards as those which are held to bind individuals. The ordinary man finds the situation bewildering. He realizes that on behalf of their state men are expected to do acts which in the sphere of private relations they would regard as monstrous. Yet he would certainly not admit that in the behaviour of states the distinction between what is fair and unfair, just and unjust, right and wrong, does not hold good. A philosophical analysis of common sense morality would probably show that underlying it is an assumption that there can be no two moralities and the same ethical principles must bind groups as individuals. The differences, common sense morality would say, lie rather in the conditions under which the principles have to be applied, in the greater complexity of the relations between states, the greater difficulty of foreseeing the consequences of action, in particular the absence of an impartial and effective legal order guaranteeing the minimum conditions of a common life, and so forth. Up to a point, analysis along these lines would clarify the issues involved and it would show, I think, that ordinary men have become increasingly conscious of their personal responsibility for the action taken by states in their behalf. Such an analysis would, however, also reveal the appalling vagueness of what may be called the secondary principles of international morality such as are expressed in words like 'national self-determination', the 'equality of states' and the principle of 'trusteeship' in its application to the treatment of backward areas. There is an equal vagueness in our knowledge of the relevant facts. The consequence is that in ordinary times it is easy to satisfy idealistic cravings in repeating these phrases without making any effort to work out their implications. In times of crisis their inadequacy becomes painfully evident and there is frequently a tendency to reject them wholly. The scepticism that results not only shakes our confidence in these secondary principles, but it raises the doubt whether there are any moral principles at all which can effectively guide the relations between states. Yet on the whole it is probable that among large numbers of individuals there is now a greater interest in the moral aspects of international relations than in any previous epoch.

It is sometimes said that in the present age two opposed ideals are striving for mastery: that which assigns supreme value to the individual and that which claims supremacy for the community. Can it be this which really divides people? Formally even the Nazi writers who are commonly cited as representing the view which claims supremacy for the community in the shape of the Volk would not admit that they deny the value of individual personality. In practice, of course, their policy leads to the ruin of personality, but then it also fails to achieve the good of the community. The trouble about the Nazis is that their so-called ethical theory lacks all sincerity, whether they talk in terms of individual or social welfare. Their aim is power as such. They talk occasionally of the ends which

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power is to serve, but that is only because they believe this to be psychologically necessary in order to inculcate obedience or inspire enthusiasm. The emphasis on the community is no doubt useful as serving to appeal to the individuals' capacities for devotion and self-sacrifice but it is doing the Nazi writers too much honour to attribute to them an ethical theory in which communal goods are consistently defined as different from individual goods. Power for them requires no justification save as a ruse for the multitude.

There is a sense in which we may correctly speak of a social or common good distinguishable in thought though not separate in reality from the good of individuals. The reference is then to a form or pattern of life considered good as a form or pattern. In this sense for example we speak of one type of family life as better than another. This seems to imply that we can attribute goodness or badness to the relations between individuals and not merely to the individuals entering into them. But strictly it is the life of the members in their relations to one another that is good or bad and not the individuals out of these relations or the relations apart from the members.

This is a matter that requires a great deal of analysis which cannot here be further attempted. But I feel sure that the issues on which men are now divided cannot be properly defined in the form of a conflict between the good of the individual and the good of the community. When the good of the community is said to be opposed to the good of the individuals, it will be found either that a sectional good is parading in the guise of the good of the whole community, or that the good has been falsely conceived to lie in ends which will not make life really better for any one and will even cheat those that partake of it, or that certain individuals claim the power to decide what is best for the rest of society. Clashes of interest there are, of course, in plenty and the necessity of grading or choosing between different values or unavoidable evils, but the issues thus involved are only obscured if interpreted in the form of a clash between the good of individuals and the good of the community, supposed in some mysterious way to be different from theirs.

When we review the examples of moral malaise that have been briefly sketched above, we can see, I think, that they are not all due to ignorance or lack of moral courage in applying known moral principles, or to the vagaries of passion and the distortion due to selfish interests. There are perplexities which would remain, granted goodwill, due in the main to the complexity of the problems which have to be faced and the difficulty of applying highly general moral principles to concrete situations of great intricacy. Those who stand for a cult of violence and inculcate it through violence are clearly beyond ethical argument. The moral fanatics are on a different level. They are carried away by an overwhelming motive, a conviction so profound that ordinary moral standards cease to operate. They too are perhaps not open to argument, but no one can pretend that the problems which the revolutionary idealist, for example, is

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confronted with are simple or unreal. They involve a grading of values and an analysis of social facts for which there exists at present no exact method. They can only be conjured to 'remember the possibility that they might be mistaken'. For the rest, the problems of the morally bewildered will not be resolved by their acceptance of an unquestioning faith, religious or other, for which there is now so much clamour. What is needed is greater moral courage and above all greater knowledge of social facts and a development of ethical theory equal to the task of evaluating and interpreting them.

MORRIS GINSBERG.

TRAGEDY AND THE 'MEDIUM'

A NOTE ON MR. SANTAYANA'S 'TRAGIC PHILOSOPHY'.

THERE appeared in this review some years ago an essay by Mr. Santayana, *Tragic Philosophy*,[1] in which I have always found valuable stimulus to disagreement. To say 'always' is to suggest that I have re-read it a good deal, and I have. In fact, I am indebted to the essay for its use as a stock resort in the discussion of Tragedy with undergraduates reading for the English Tripos. I don't want to suggest that the debt incurred has been purely a matter of opportunities for disagreement. *Tragic Philosophy* exhibits Mr. Santayana's characteristic brilliance and wit—that rare wit (not rare in Mr. Santayana, of course) which is the focussed sharpness of illuminating intelligence. But it has striking weaknesses (or so I see them), and it is the considerations raised by one of them in particular that I am concerned with here. They are considerations that take me back to a point I made in discussing Johnson's criticism in the last number of *Scrutiny*.

Many admirers of Mr. Santayana besides myself must have been surprised at the way in which he plays off Macbeth's speech beginning *Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow* against the passage attributed by Dante to Piccarda de Donati in which occurs the line

E'n la sua volontade è nostra pace.

True, earlier in the essay he has said that Shakespeare 'like an honest miscellaneous dramatist . . . was putting into the mouths of his different characters the sentiments that, for the moment, were suggested to him by their predicaments' (p. 367). But he unmistakably slips into arguing as if Macbeth's comment on the plight to which the action has brought him may be taken as Shakespeare's just as Piccarda may be taken as speaking for Dante. Mr. Santa-

[1] *Scrutiny*, March, 1936.

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yana's point, I recognize, is that Shakespeare hasn't a settled and coherent philosophy to set against Dante's—though 'possibly if he had been pressed by some troublesome friend to propound a personal philosophy, he might have found in his irritation nothing else to fall back upon than the animal despair of Macbeth. Fortunately we may presume that burgherly comfort and official orthodoxy saved him from being unreasonably pressed'. (p. 368). But we are at the same time invited, unambiguously, to take Macbeth's speech as representing such substitute for a philosophy as Shakespeare, in this play, has to offer:

> 'I questioned at the beginning whether the poetic value of unlike things could be pronounced equal: and if now I compare this whole passage with the passage from *Macbeth* I find that to my sense they are incommensurable. Both are notable passages, if that is all that was meant; but they belong to different poetic worlds, appealing to and developing different sides of the mind. And there is more than disparity between these two worlds; there is contrariety and hostility between them, in as much as each professes to include and to subordinate the other, and in so doing to annul its tragic dignity and moral finality. For the mood of Macbeth, religion and philosophy are insane vapours; for the mood of Dante, Macbeth is possessed by the devil. There is no possible common ground, no common criterion even of taste or beauty'.

For the mood of Shakespeare too, we are moved to retort, Macbeth is possessed by the devil: the tragic dignity and moral finality of Shakespeare's world are focussed in Macbeth's cry of 'animal despair' only in so far as this refers us, inevitably (one would have thought), to the quite other effect of the total action—the total action in relation to which the speech has its significance. By his plunge into crime, taken in fatal ignorance of his nature—

> If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well
> It were done quickly

—he has confounded 'this little state of man' and the impersonal order from which it is inseparable. It is not on his extinction after a tale of sound and fury, signifying nothing, that the play ends, and his valedictory nihilism is the vindication of the moral and spiritual order he has outraged, and which is re-established in the close.

How, one asks, can Mr. Santayana have failed to see things so obvious? The answer follows immediately on the sentence of his last quoted:

> 'We might at best say that both poets succeed in conveying what they wish to convey, and that in that sense their skill is equal: but I hardly think this is true in fact, because in Shakespeare the medium is rich and thick and more important than the idea; whereas in Dante the medium is as unvarying and simple as possible, and meant to be transparent. Even in this choice

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passage, there are stretches of pure scholastic reasoning, not poetical at all to our sensuous and romantic apprehension; yet the studious and rapt poet feels himself carried on those wings of logic into a paradise of truth, where choir answers choir, and everything is beautiful. A clear and transparent medium is admirable, when we love what we have to say; but when what we have to say is nothing previously definite, expressiveness depends on stirring the waters deeply, suggesting a thousand half-thoughts and letting the very unutterableness of our passion become manifest in our disjointed words. The medium then becomes dominant: but can this be called success in expression? It is rather success in making an impression, if the reader is impressed . . .'

The critic who falls so complete a victim to the word 'medium' as Mr. Santayana here shows himself doesn't, it is plain, understand the poetic—and the essentially dramatic—use of language that Shakespeare's verse supremely exemplifies. He cannot, then, understand the nature of the organization that goes with that use of language: he cannot appreciate the ways in which the themes and significances of the play are dramatically presented. Take, for instance, this betraying sentence:

> 'So at this point in *Macbeth*, where Seneca would have unrolled the high maxims of orthodox Stoicism, Shakespeare gives us the humours of his distracted hero; a hero nonplussed, confounded, stultified in his own eyes, a dying gladiator, a blinded lion at bay'. (p. 367).

We don't, when we are responding properly, say that 'Shakespeare gives us Macbeth's speech': it comes to us, not from the author, but from the play, emerging dramatically from a dramatic context. It offers no parallel to Seneca's 'high maxims'. And the 'philosophy', moral significance, or total upshot, of the play isn't stated but enacted. But for Mr. Santayana significance is a matter of 'ideas', and 'ideas' have to be stated, and so, looking for an epitomizing statement, he excises that speech from the organism to which it belongs fixes it directly on Shakespeare, and gives us his surprising commentary.

We have only shifted the question a stage further back, of course. How can so subtle an intelligence as Mr. Santayana's have let itself be so victimized? The answer, I think, is that he is a philosopher. This is not to suggest that a philosopher can, for his own purposes, safely dispense with the ability to comprehend Shakespearean poetry. On the contrary, Mr. Santayana's inappreciation seems to me to go with a naïvety about the nature of conceptual thought that is common among philosophers, to their disadvantage as such. In venturing so far I may be merely exposing myself; but this, I am sure, must be said: to demand that poetry should be a 'medium' for 'previously definite' ideas is arbitrary, and betrays a radical incomprehension. What Mr. Santayana calls 'Shakespeare's medium' creates what it conveys; 'previously definite'

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ideas put into a 'clear and transparent' medium wouldn't have been definite enough for Shakespeare's purpose. It is in place to quote again here a passage of D. W. Harding on Isaac Rosenberg that I quoted in considering Johnson:

> 'Usually when we speak of finding words to express a thought we seem to mean that we have the thought rather close to formulation and use it to measure the adequacy of any possible phrasing that occurs to us, treating words as servants of the idea. "Clothing a thought in language", whatever it means psychologically, seems a fair metaphorical description of most speaking and writing. Of Rosenberg's work it would be misleading. He—like many poets in some degree, one supposes—brought language to bear on the incipient thought at an earlier stage of its development. Instead of the emerging idea being racked slightly so as to fit a more familiar approximation of itself, and words found for *that*, Rosenberg let it manipulate words almost from the beginning, often without insisting on the controls of logic and intelligibility'.

The control over Shakespeare's words in *Macbeth* (for what Harding describes is the essentially poetic use of language, a use in which Shakespeare is pre-eminent) is a complex dramatic theme vividly and profoundly realized—not thought of, but possessed imaginatively in its concreteness, so that, as it grows in specificity, it in turn possesses the poet's mind and commands expression. To explain how so marvellous a definiteness of conception and presentment can have been missed by Mr. Santayana one has to invoke a training in inappropriate linguistic habits—inappropriate, that is, to the reading of Shakespeare: unable to relinquish irrelevant demands, the critic cannot take what is offered; misinformed and blinded by preconceptions, he cannot see what is there.

The case, readers will have noted, has much in common with Johnson's. Mr. Santayana too has a way of paradoxically appreciating while exhibiting his inability to appreciate like that I have pointed to in Johnson's dealings with Shakespeare:

> 'But as living poetry, as a mould and stimulus for honest feeling, is Dante for us at all comparable to Shakespeare? Shakespeare, in passages such as this from *Macbeth*, is orchestrated. He trills away into fancy: what was daylight a moment ago, suddenly becomes a candle: we are not thinking or reasoning, we are dreaming. He needs but to say "all our yesterdays", and presently the tedium of childhood, the tedium of labour and illness, the vacancy of friendships lost, rise like ghosts before us, and fill us with a sense of the unreality of all that once seemed most real. When he mentions "a poor player" we think at once of the poet himself, because our minds are biographical and our sympathies novelesque; we feel the misery and the lurid contrasts of a comedian's life; and the existence that just now seemed merely vain now seems also tempestuous and bitter'.

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Can we say that the author of this cannot understand the Shakespearean use of language, and cannot therefore appreciate the nature and force of the Shakespearean 'medium'? What we have here implies, surely, a pretty good analysis of the speech? But Mr. Santayana goes on:

> 'And the rhythms help; the verse struts and bangs, holds our attention suspended, obliges our thoughts to become rhetorical, and brings our declamation round handsomely to a grand finale. We should hardly have found courage in ourselves for so much passion and theatricality; but we bless Shakespeare for enabling us still to indulge in such emotions, and to relieve ourselves of a weight that we hardly knew we were carrying'.

These sentences are perhaps not so unequivocal as Johnson's pejorative remarks, but it is nevertheless impossible not to take them as cancelling the appreciation. We relate them to these earlier sentences, and to their significant failure to distinguish between irresponsible exuberance and the mature Shakespearean mastery of language:

> 'Shakespeare was a professional actor, a professional dramatist; his greatness lay there, and in the gift of the gab: in that exuberance and joy in language which everybody had in that age, but he supremely. The Renaissance needed no mastering living religion, no mastering living philosophy. Life was gayer without them'. (p. 367).

The implications are plain enough. It would clearly be misleading to say that the critic who can express himself thus can properly appreciate Shakespeare's poetry. He clearly cannot appreciate the organization that has its local life in the verse. He has no inkling of the way in which the mastering living theme commands and controls the words.

It will have been noted that in the former of the two passages just quoted Mr. Santayana gives us an account of tragic catharsis. It is peculiarly interesting because in it he associated the cathartic effect with a poetic use (as he understands it) of language. We are bound to question his understanding, and in attempting to provide our own account of a poetic use we find ourselves exploring for a profounder and more satisfactory account of Tragedy—of the tragic—than he implies here, or offers elsewhere in his essay. This at any rate is what, in my experience, gives the essay its peculiar value.

The view of the tragic implied in Mr. Santayana's account of catharsis seems a very limited one. Does Shakespearean tragedy, does the tragic in *Macbeth*, amount to no more than this? If so, where can we look for anything profounder? For surely the tragic experience is, or can be, a more important and serious matter than Mr. Santayana here suggests?

To postulate a 'tragic experience' or 'tragic effect' and then seek to define it is to lay oneself open to the suspicion of proposing a solemn and time-honoured academic game. Yet the critical

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contemplation of the profoundest things in literature does lead to the idea of such an experience, and we can see to it that the attempt at definition shall not be the kind of futility we associate with the Grand Style or the Sublime and the Beautiful. It need hardly be said, for instance, that what we are concerned with will not be found in all tragedies, or in most. And next, it is well to put aside the term 'catharsis': its promptings don't seem to be at all helpful, and the exercise of refining upon, or interpreting away, Aristotle's medical metaphor may be left to the unfortunate student who knows that he may be required to 'apply' the *Poetics* to Shakespeare, Webster, Racine, Ibsen or Eugene O'Neill in the examination-room. If 'calm' may properly be predicated of the tragic experience, it is certainly not 'calm of mind, all passion spent' in the natural suggestion of that phrase. According to what seems valid in the current notion of the tragic there is rather something in the nature of an exalting effect. We have contemplated a painful action, involving death and the destruction of the good, admirable and sympathetic, and yet instead of being depressed we enjoy a sense of enhanced vitality.

I take this general account as granted—as recognized for sound as far as it goes. The conditions of something ostensibly answering to it are described by Mr. Santayana in his account of the Senecan tragic attitude or philosophy:

> 'Mr. Eliot says that this philosophy is derived from Seneca; and it is certain that in Seneca's tragedies, if not in his treatises, there is a pomp of diction, a violence of pose, and a suicidal despair not unlike the tone of this passage. But would Seneca ever have said that life signifies nothing? It signified for him the universal reign of law, of reason, of the will of God. Fate was inhuman, it was cruel, it excited and crushed every finite wish; yet there was something in man that shared that disdain for humanity, and triumphed in that ruthless march of order and necessity. Something superior, not inferior, Seneca would have said; something that not only raised the mind into sympathy with the truth of nature and the decrees of heaven, but that taught the blackest tragedy to sing in verse. The passions in foreseeing their defeat became prophets, in remembering it became poets, and they created the noblest beauties by defying and transcending death'.

Mr. Santayana seems to imply (he says nothing crude, of course, and he shows considerable suppleness in presenting his case) that Seneca has an advantage over Shakespeare in this tragic philosophy, however the total comparison between the two poets may work out. Without granting this, we may at any rate feel that the formula for the tragic it represents, in Mr. Santayana's account of it, deserves pondering. It deserves pondering because, though clearly unsatisfactory, it has (we feel) something of the right form.

It is most clearly unsatisfactory because, in the terms in which it stands, it is equivocal. In spite of the 'something superior, not

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inferior' it reminds us too much of 'the bitter beauty of the universe and the frail human pride that confronts it for a moment undismayed'. It is, in fact, not clearly enough distinguishable from 'A Free Man's Worship':

> 'Brief and powerless is Man's life; on him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way; for Man, condemned to-day to lose his dearest, to-morrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day; disdaining the coward terrors of the slave of Fate, to worship at the shrine that his own hands have built; undismayed by the empire of chance, to preserve a mind free from the wanton tyranny that rules his outward life; proudly defiant of the irresistible forces that tolerate, for a moment, his knowledge and his condemnation, to sustain alone, a weary but unyielding Atlas, the world that his own ideals have fashioned despite the trampling march of unconscious power'.[2]

The tragic experience, however it is to be defined, is certainly not anything that encourages, or permits, an indulgence in the dramatization of one's nobly-suffering self. Mr. Santayana's Seneca, of course, doesn't propose anything as crude. Nevertheless, as we ponder the '*disdain* for humanity' and the '*defying* . . . death', it strikes us that the Senecan attitude as described is perilously ready to subside into something of a kindred order to the prose of *A Free Man's Worship*: the differences aren't radical enough. We recall Mr. Eliot's observations (in *Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca*) on the Senecan influence in Elizabethan drama, and its relation to the trick of rhetorical self-boosting.

And whether Mr. Eliot is right or not in associating Othello's self-dramatizing habit with the Senecan influence, he gives us the cue for saying that the attitude represented by Othello's last speech is radically untragic. This is so obvious as to seem, perhaps, not worth saying: Othello, for those who don't join in the traditional sentimentalization of the play, is a very obvious case. The essential point that has to be made is that his valedictory *coup de théâtre* represents a rhetorical inflation, a headily emotional glorification, of an incapacity for tragic experience that marks the ordinary moments of us all.

There is a passage of one of D. H. Lawrence's letters that came into my mind when this point was under discussion:

> 'I am so sick of people: they preserve an evil, bad, separating spirit under the warm cloak of good words. That is intolerable in them. The Conservative talks about the old and glorious national ideal, the Liberal talks about this great struggle for right in which the nation is engaged, the peaceful women talk about

[2]Bertrand Russell, *Mysticism and Logic*, p. 56.

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> disarmament and international peace. Bertie Russell talks about democratic control and the educating of the artisan, and all this, all this goodness, is just a warm and cosy cloak for a bad spirit. They all want the same thing: a continuing in this state of disintegration wherein each separate little ego is an independent little principality by itself. What does Russell really want? He wants to keep his own established ego, his finite and ready-defined self intact, free from contact and connection. He wants to be ultimately a free agent. That is what they all want, ultimately—that is what is at the back of all international peace-for-ever and democratic control talks: they want an outward system of nullity, which they call peace and godwill, so that in their own souls they can be independent little gods, referred nowhere and to nothing, little mortal Absolutes, secure from question. (*Letters*, p. 247).

The particular justice or injustice of these animadversions needn't be discussed: one wouldn't go to Lawrence for judicial fairness towards persons or parties, and there are necessary political and kindred activities at levels at which the characteristic Laurentian contribution may well appear the reverse of helpful or encouraging. But it is just his part, as he sees it, to insist—with a passionate insistence exasperating to energizers for movements and policies—that there are profounder levels; levels of experience that, though they tend constantly to be ignored, are always, in respect of any concern for life and health, supremely relevant. The most effective insistence would be tragic art. Lawrence, in fact, might fairly (for my present purpose) be said to be pronouncing of the attitudes he stigmatizes that they are incompatible with tragic experience.

At any rate, it is an essential part of the definition of the tragic that it breaks down, or undermines and supersedes, such attitudes. It establishes below them a kind of profound impersonality in which experience matters, not because it is mine—because it is to me it belongs or happens, or because it subserves or issues in purpose or will, but because it is what it is, the 'mine' mattering only in so far as the individual sentience is the indispensable focus of experience.

The attainment in literature of this level, and of organization at this level, would seem to involve the poetic use of language, or of processes that amount to that. By the 'poetic' use of language I mean that which I described as 'dramatic' in discussing Johnson's criticism and the limits to his appreciation of Shakespeare. For Johnson, I said, expression was necessarily statement; critically, he couldn't come to terms with the use of language, not as a medium in which to put 'previously definite ideas', but for exploratory creation. Poetry as creating what it presents, and as presenting something that stands there to speak for itself, or, rather, that isn't a matter of saying, but of being and enacting, he couldn't properly understand. In this he is representative of the eighteenth century, and (the point was made in discussion) it is significant that that century, which went in so much for formal tragedy, should have shown itself so utterly incapable of attaining the tragic. The use of language for the expression of 'previously definite' ideas needn't,

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of course, carry with it social and rational conventions as obviously limiting as the Augustan, but in proposing for the poet as his true business the lucid arrangement of ready-minted concepts Mr. Santayana proposes (it seems to me) limitations as essentially disabling for tragedy as the Augustan. It may not be altogether true to say that in such a use of language—in the business of expressing 'previously definite' ideas—one is necessarily confined to one's 'established ego', one's 'ready-defined self'. But it does seem as if the 'tragic' transcendence of ordinary experience that can be attained by a mind tied to such a use must inevitably tend towards the rhetorical order represented by Mr. Santayana's account of Seneca's tragic philosophy (or—shall I say?—by the Senecan attitude as no doubt fairly conveyed by Mr. Santayana).

Such an attitude is really an exaltation of the 'established ego', and, as we have seen, cannot be securely distinguished from the kind of attitude one strikes. The attainment of the level of experience at which emancipation from the 'ready-defined self' is compelled involves an essentially different order of expression; one in which heightening is deepening, exaltation has nothing alcoholic about it, and rhetoric (as in *Othello*—for those who take what Shakespeare offers) is 'placed'.

It is interesting to see Yeats, in his own way and by his own characteristic approach, making the point in question. He rebels, in his Aesthetically-given youth, against the flatness of the dialogue in post-Ibsenian drama (see *Essays*). Modern naturalistic speech, he feels, precludes beauty and significance. We can never, of course, feel quite safe, reading these protests in Yeatsian prose, against a suggestion of 'Rosa Alchemica' and the 'trembling of the veil'. Nevertheless he makes the necessary points and makes them firmly. You cannot he notes (p. 339 and elsewhere) be passionate in educated modern speech: Ibsen in the attempt to overcome this difficulty invented a conventional rhetoric. Poetry, with attendant non-naturalistic conventions (see the essay on *Certain Noble Plays of Japan*), is necessary in order to provide the distance and the frame without which there can be no intensity of the right kind. And then we come to this (*The Tragic Theatre*): 'I saw plainly what should have been plain from the first line I had written, that tragedy must always be a drowning, a breaking of the dykes that separate man from man . . .' Yeats's intention in this, which is immediately related to his preoccupation with convention and the 'medium', has unmistakably the directest relation to what I have been trying to say above.

We might further invoke as obviously relevant Nietzsche's insistence on the Dionysiac. But perhaps after all the Nietzschean witness had better be dispensed with; at the best it introduces a disturbing vibration. The Nietzschean context is uncongenial to the present purpose, and a glance at it prompts the remark that the tragic calm (if 'calm' is the word), while not the product of any laxative catharsis, is not in the least the calm of the tensed and self-approving will.

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The sense of heightened life that goes with the tragic experience is conditioned by a transcending of the ego—an escape from all attitudes of self-assertion. 'Escape', perhaps, is not altogether a good word, since it might suggest something negative and irresponsible (just as 'Dionysiac' carries unacceptable suggestions of the Dark Gods). Actually the experience is constructive or creative, and involves a recognizing of positive value as in some way defined and vindicated by death. It is as if we were challenged at the profoundest level with the question, 'In what does the significance of life reside?', and found ourselves contemplating, for answer, a view of life, and of the things giving it value, that makes the valued appear unquestionably more important than the valuer, so that significance lies, clearly and inescapably, in the willing adhesion of the individual self to something other than itself. Here, for instance, is D. A. Traversi writing on *Antony and Cleopatra* (with his relative valuation of which, I had better add by the way, I don't agree):

> 'For death, which had seemed in the Sonnets and early tragedies to be incontrovertible evidence of the subjection of love and human values to Time, now becomes by virtue of Shakespeare's poetic achievement an instrument of release, the necessary condition of an experience which, though dependent upon Time and circumstance, is by virtue of its *value* and intensity incommensurate with them—that is "immortal". The emotions of Antony and Cleopatra are built upon "dungy earth", upon "Nilus' slime", and so upon Time which these elements by their nature imply; but, just as earth and slime are quickened into fire and air, whilst retaining their sensible qualities as constituent parts of the final experience, so Time itself becomes a necessary element in the creation of "immortality".' (*Approach to Shakespeare*, p. 126).

I quote this for its relevant suggestiveness. It seems to me to compare very interestingly with the following passage from D. W. Harding (whose distinctive strength in criticism—I add, in case I should have appeared to be betraying metaphysical ambitions—goes with a psychologist's approach):

> 'Death in itself was not his concern, but only death at the moment when life was simplified and intensified; this he felt had a significance which he represents by immortality. For him it was no more than the immortality of the possibilities of life. This immortality and the value he glimpses in the living effort of war in no way mitigate his suffering at the human pain and waste. The value of what was destroyed seemed to him to have been brought into sight only by the destruction, and he had to respond to both facts without allowing either to neutralize the other. It is this which is most impressive in Rosenberg—the complexity of experience which he was strong enough to permit himself and which his technique was fine enough to reveal'.[4]

[4] *Scrutiny*, Vol. III, pp. 362-363 (*The Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg*).

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I will not attempt to develop the kind of discussion of Tragedy that the juxtaposition of these passages might seem to promise—or threaten. It suits my purpose rather to note the stress laid by Harding on 'complexity' and 'technique' (compare Traversi's 'poetic achievement'—a phrase that sums up much preceding analysis of Shakespeare's verse), and to note further that he passes on to 'impersonality':

> 'To say that Rosenberg tried to understand all that the war stood for means probably that he tried to expose the whole of himself to it. In one letter he describes as an intention what he obviously achieved: "I will not leave a corner of my consciousness covered up, but saturate myself with the strange and extraordinary new conditions of this life . . ." This willingness—and ability—to let himself be new-born into the new situation, not subduing his experience to his established personality, is a large part, if not the whole secret of the robustness which characterizes his best work . . . Here as in all the war poems his suffering and discomfort are unusually *direct*; there is no secondary distress arising from the sense that these things *ought not* to be. He was given up to realizing fully what *was*. . . .
>
> It was Rosenberg's exposure of his whole personality that gave his work its quality of impersonality'.

What Harding says about Rosenberg in these passages has clearly the closest relevance to Tragedy. And it is especially significant, for my theme, that they belong to the essay containing that discussion of the poetic use of language which I have found so useful in defining the limitations, in respect of the tragic, of Johnson and (I suggest) Mr. Santayana.

This significance, my main concern in this note, will get a suitable parting stress, if we consider I. A. Richards's treatment of 'impersonality', which has, on the surface, resemblances to Harding's. Dr. Richards deals with 'impersonality' and Tragedy together in the same chapter (XXXII) of *The Principles of Literary Criticism*. These pages (245-253) contain some of the most valuably suggestive things in the book, and if, for my convenience, I dwell on the weaknesses, I have at any rate the justification that they are entailed by Richards's essential Neo-Benthamite ambition, which is irreconcilable with his best insight. (And I am urging that these pages should be read, or re-read).

The ambition asserts itself characteristically when Richards, having told us that, in the full tragic experience, the 'mind does not shy away from anything, it does not protect itself with any illusion, it stands uncomforted, unintimidated, alone and self-reliant', goes on to pronounce toughly (p. 246):

> 'The joy which is so strangely at the heart of the experience is not an indication that "all's right with the world" or that "somewhere, somehow, there is Justice"; it is an indication that all is right here and now in the nervous system'.

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For him, of course, Tragedy is the supreme instance of the inclusive organization of impulses; it is 'perhaps the most general all-accepting, all-ordering experience known' (p. 247). Experience, for the purposes of the new science, must be reducible to unit impulses, so that evaluation may be quantitative. We are not, then, surprised when we read (p. 248):

> 'This balanced poise, stable through its power of inclusion, not through the force of its exclusions, is not peculiar to Tragedy. It is a general characteristic of all the most valuable experiences of the arts. It can be given by a carpet or a pot or by a gesture as unmistakably as by the Parthenon, it may come about through an epigram as clearly as through a Sonata'.

I must confess myself to have found, with surprise, that I had carried away a wrong impression from this passage—an impression that Richards actually pronounces the tragic experience to be obtainable from a carpet or a pot. But it is easy to see how I came to form it, the argument moving as it does, with so easy and uninhibited a transition. And it is not at all easy to see how Richards can satisfactorily explain the differences that divide any experience fitly to be called 'tragic' from the most inclusively-poised experience a carpet or a pot can be supposed to give. The scientifico-psychological ambition entails his taking his diagrams of poised and organized 'impulses' or 'appetencies' too seriously: he couldn't go on supposing he took his science seriously if he even began to recognize the remoteness of their relevance to concrete experiences.

This may seem, so late in the day, too obvious a kind of criticism to be worth reiterating; but I want to give it a special point in relation to my main argument. No theory of Tragedy can amount to more than a blackboard diagram, a mere schematic substitute for understanding, unless it is associated with an adequate appreciation of the subtleties of poetic (or creative) language—the subtleties that are supremely illustrated in the poetry of Shakespeare. Such an appreciation if operative, would have inhibited Dr. Richards's reliance on his 'impulses' and his 'nervous system'. This point is not the less worth making because he has always, in his Neo-Benthamite way, been interested in language and the meaning of meaning. He has, since the phase represented by *The Principles of Literary Criticism*, specialized in Semasiology. But no interest in language that is Benthamite in spirit, or controlled by a Neo-Benthamite ambition, can afford to recognize the profoundest aspects of linguistic 'communication'—those we find ourselves contemplating when we contemplate in the concrete the nature of tragic impersonality. Such an interest can no more be adequate to them than the Utilitarian calculus—with its water-tight unit self, confined, for all self-transcendence, to external transactions with other selves—could engage on the kind of interest in moral issues taken by George Eliot.

F. R. LEAVIS.

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TWO GENERATIONS OF ENGLISH MUSIC

RECORDS:

HOLST:

The Hymn of Jesus (The Huddersfield Choral Society and the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Malcolm Sargent). H.M.V. under the auspices of the British Council.

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS:

Symphony No. 5 in D (The Hallé Orchestra conducted by John Barbirolli). H.M.V. under the auspices of the British Council.

SCORES:

BRITTEN:

A Ceremony of Carols for women's voices and harp.

Serenade for Tenor and string orchestra. (Boosey and Hawkes).

TIPPETT:

String Quartet No. 2.

Oratorio, A Child of our Time (piano score).

Plebs Angelica, anthem for double chorus.

AFTER fifty years of the 'English musical renaissance' it is perhaps time to take stock; for it is now more possible to understand what in it is intrinsic achievement and what is merely historically important. If one reflects on the musical situation in England at the turn of the century it seems astonishing enough that the creative spark has been rekindled at all; the scope and variety of creative musical activity in this country to-day is certainly greater than any impartial intelligent observer would have bargained for thirty, or even twenty, years ago. The early years of the renaissance now look rather like a musical 'sport'; Parry and Stanford were not unintelligent about what was wrong with English music, but they just weren't creative enough to give fresh and native life to an alien tradition stemming from the Handel oratorio and then from Mendelssohn and Brahms. Elgar triumphed (we are apt to forget after how many false starts) by recreating the German idiom into an English speech through what one can only call an almost miraculous force of genius; the transition from his early Crystal Palace-like, dowdy festival competition choral pieces to the *Enigma* and the *Introduction and Allegro* and the concertos is an achievement to which I don't think there is any parallel in musical history. He incredibly made universally valid virtues out of attitudes which, as exemplified in Edwardian society, usually assumed an undesirable form; but his achievement is singularly isolated, nor are the values by which his music lives very apposite to the contemporary world.

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Granting the singularity of Elgar, what were, we have to ask, the choices open to an English composer at the turn of the century? He could take the path of least resistance and, without even realizing that his position was in any way peculiar, he could become an academy piece. Or he could turn his back on the contemporary world altogether and write a music of lyrical rhapsody and harmonic nostalgia, only he'd have to possess, like Delius at his best, outstanding originality and stamina if he was to adopt this course without becoming meandering and unconvincing. Or he could indulge in a safer compromise between a kind of elegiac chromatic harmonic 'poetry' and the academic tradition, as in the early work of John Ireland. Or he could think honestly and intelligently about the position English music found itself in and then apply powerful creative gifts to the attempt to solve the problems—at once musical and sociological—which his intelligence revealed. At this date I think we can see clearly that there were two men who saw what had to be done and who had the vitality and integrity to do it, hard and —in the case of one of them at least—unrewarding though the struggle might seem to be. The men were of course Holst and Vaughan Williams. In the case of Elgar we see genius triumphing in spite of adversity, and in the case of Delius one might say that genius triumphs *because of* adversity; but Holst and Vaughan Williams triumph *over* adversity and this is why they are, not composers of greater genius, but figures of such crucial importance in our musical history.

Working in industrial London, Holst was unavoidably self-conscious in his attempt to evolve again a music of the English language. He began by writing works which he later referred to as 'good old Wagnerian bawling', impregnated with the alien and stale conventions; through the study of eastern musics he came to realize the significance of unaccompanied line; and then he turned his attention to the moulding of the distinctively English idiom. Characteristically he returned to the most linear aspects of English music—folk song and mediaeval monody and polyphony, not in any antiquarian spirit but because he saw the deepest source of the musical language in the verbal one; so fundamental a return to foundations, however apparently unnatural in a mechanized society, was essential because the contact with the spoken language and the continuity of our musical thought had been so completely broken by the eighteenth century Germanizing influence of Handel and by the closely connected industrial one of the nineteenth century. As he develops his music becomes more and more plastic and prose-like in mode and rhythm; the harmonies in themselves become more and more simple, the subtlety of their effect increasingly depending on the unexpected contexts in which they appear (Consider the section in the Hymn beginning 'Fain would I be saved').

One of the central problems of musical composition is how to reconcile the basic speech rhythm with song—with the self-contained lyrical creation. In the Hymn you can see Holst's struggle with the problem in the odd interaction of dance metres with his wavering

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speech-like lines and in his use of ground basses to give these lines a stability which intrinsically they haven't got. Of course Holst didn't succeed in recovering the intimate relation between music and language and life which had existed up till Purcell's day: no one man could. It is significant that although he studied Tudor polyphony and Purcellian declamation these do not have nearly so much influence on his music as does mediaeval monody and organum. He returns to fundamentals but those fundamentals are now inevitably remote; he does not take up the musical problems at the point where they were laid aside in the seventeenth century. His music shows a fine instinct for the setting of the English language; but it is seldom dramatic and declamatory; it is often heterophonic, but much less often than is commonly supposed does he write genuine polyphony (again the ostensibly polyphonic parts of the Hymn should be examined). Thus there is a sense in which Holst is a necessary and important but negative composer. Those who heard the performance which the B.B.C. gave last winter of Holst's *Hymn of Jesus* along with the *Festival Mass* of Janacek will realize that a composer of greater genius and with a less inhibiting background could create music, starting from similar premisses, which is not only boldly original but also instinct with terrific, positive assurance, at once a Catholic act of praise to God and a pagan act of homage to the earth: and such music implies the most intimate contact between composer and audience, a contact such as you can perhaps have nowadays only in an agricultural society. But if we feel that there was a failure of creativity in Holst's development, perhaps failure is hardly a just word when the very nature of his achievement is so intrinsically conditioned by its limitations. He showed us once more what the English prose line was like. The reconciliation of this English line with the flowing of a singing lyricism was to be consummated in the symphonies of his pupil Edmund Rubbra. Apart from the intrinsic value and beauty of much of his work, that fact is of itself of great importance to English musical history. It is like a rebirth of positive belief which could have occurred only after the rigorous destruction, such as we find in Holst's later work, of the all too prevalent bogus beliefs and fake emotions (or melodic and harmonic clichés). Holst pared his music to the bare bones, letting the sawdust and red ink out of the accepted idiom; Rubbra without sacrificing that austere integrity, brings back the lyrical blood and the harmonic flesh. Again it is a matter of more than purely musical significance that Tudor polyphony (as is revealed in the masterly new motet) has always been a dominating influence on Rubbra's work.

Vaughan Williams has been for the last forty years so much the figure of commanding authority in English music that his position seems superficially easier to assess. Actually I think it is more difficult; or, if I may put the matter personally, I'd say that although I've never had any doubt about Vaughan Williams's importance, I used to find it rather difficult to decide what were the works on which his importance rested; I couldn't, that is, avoid a suspicion

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that his historical was greater than his intrinsic significance. And this would certainly be understandable, considering the difficulty of the period through which he has had to live. His manner of tackling the problem was less radical than Holst's, perhaps because he was more completely an Englishman, and a countryman, in his attitudes. For Holst (who was of course of German descent) a complete purge was essential; he had to start afresh from the very roots of English musical speech and the English language. But for Vaughan Williams folk song meant something more positive; it stood clearly for aspects of English life and character which he valued deeply, which were fast passing away, but to which he still felt that he in part at least belonged. This is why his early works, even such beautiful works as *On Wenlock Edge,* have often a regressive quality which Holst's haven't (because his was an uncompromisingly isolated spirit) and which Janacek's haven't (because he lived in a still predominantly agricultural society). Nor is it surprising that these works provided the model for an enormous crop of minor elegiac music in the Shropshire Lad vein, thereby establishing the notion that contemporary English music was 'provincial' in attitude and technique. Temporarily there was no alternative; for while it is extremely difficult to create a great solo melodic line, it is equally easy to ramble vaguely around the modal-vocal clichés, making the kind of music susceptible to jokes about cows looking over gates. But all through the years up to about 1925 Vaughan Williams does not rest where his imitators rest; always he is struggling with the problem of how to achieve the English line on what are fundamentally monodic, modal and pentatonic principles (but less close to speech than Holst's, closer to song), and yet to build works on a fairly large scale such as was possible, through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries at least, only with the help of the architectural harmonic punctuation which isn't really appropriate to the monophonic approach. In the *Sea Symphony,* and even the *London Symphony,* there are signs of a confusion of idioms, traces of defunct and alien conventions, of the incomplete solution of the problems involved. By the time of the *Pastoral* the realization is perfect. The orchestral delineation of the lines acquires a delicate translucency, the fluid structure is an entirely successful extension in harmonic terms from monodic principles, and the concluding soprano solo is the consummation of the monodic or folk-song aspects of the composer's work up to that date. The symphony seems to me a masterpiece of critical importance in English musical history. And yet—the insistence on its 'historical' position itself reminds us—one would hesitate to call the *Pastoral* a 'great' work: it is too much the product of a peculiar—and really unnatural—set of social circumstances.

I have said that folk-song meant something more positive for Vaughan Williams than it did for Holst; that it was more than a return to musical essentials but entailed conceptions that we may broadly call sociological. It is thus that the folk-song element links up with his rediscovery of England's great musical tradition of the

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Tudor era and his attempt to build a contemporary tradition on those foundations, rather than on nineteenth-century Germanic ones. Again Tudor music was a much more positive thing to Vaughan Williams than it was to Holst who loved and revered it rather as something glowing and vital to which the isolated modern consciousness could not hope to attain, so that he preferred to return to the roots from which Tudor music had sprung, to a civilization unequivocally remote. But to Vaughan Williams Tudor music was not remote; to a considerable extent he still felt like that, and had the power and conviction to do so. The *Tallis Fantasia*—probably his greatest work before the *Pastoral* and *Job*—is thus ostensibly and unashamedly a *genre* piece, and yet equally certainly Vaughan Williams himself. Again it seems to me that the circumstances conditioning the creation of the work are somewhat too peculiar to warrant our calling it a work of classical status. But it is a noble and beautiful piece of music, exquisitely conceived and written for the medium, and far and away surpassing any work of his disciples which superficially resembles it. Moreover such an achievement made Vaughan Williams's own later work possible; and also made it possible for composers like Rubbra and Tippett to accept their Elizabethan inheritance unselfconsciously, as it were by birthright.

To such a natural relation to the Tudor convention Vaughan Williams himself had to win through gradually, and not all his 'Tudor' works achieve the same level of integrity—the later *Tudor Portraits* for instance seem to me a *genre* piece in a bad sense. But always the preocupation with Tudor music gives an added intensity to the fundamentally social nature of the composer's interest in folk-song; and ultimately he does attain to a reconciliation of the Tudor tradition with an urgently contemporary idiom, unconditioned by immediate time and place. His most obviously 'contemporary' works, the piano concerto and the fourth symphony, while being fundamentally English in line beneath their aggressive dissonance and occasional polytonality are fairly clearly experimental pieces, significantly influenced by Holst's more radical approach to the rebirth of the English musical language, and particularly late Holst such as the orchestral Scherzo with its extraordinarily disturbing cleavage between wavering prose lines and ferocious metrical accent. Indubitably they are the creation of a powerful and original mind; equally certainly they are not works of classic achievement. It seems to me that there are two works of Vaughan Williams which are supremely successful in fusing England's past with her present; two works, one written just before the experimental pieces, the other after, which, the result of many years' labour and intelligent application in an unfavourable environment, take their place among the classical masterpieces. They are *Job* and the *Fifth Symphony*.

I think one reason for the mastery of *Job* may be its connection with the physical movements of the dance which provide a strict formal discipline within which the free modal melodic lines can attain their maximum intensity. The formal problems implicit in

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most of Vaughan Williams's work—the apparent disproportion between the modal lyricism and symphonic development—here resolve into the more directly functional problem of reconciling the music with the formalization of the dance, and concentration upon so specific an issue seems to have put the composer very much on his mettle. In any case *Job* is not only a 'landmark' in English musical history; it is a great work in its own right.

The *Fifth Symphony in D*, Vaughan Williams's most recent large-scale work, is, I think, his supreme achievement. The work has received a mixed reception. Some have seen in it a mere reversion to the composer's earlier manner and have regretted that he has apparently abandoned the more adventurous tendencies which were manifested in the piano concerto and the fourth symphony; it has even been suggested that the reversion was inevitable after Holst's death, as though Vaughan Williams, of all people, wasn't able to stand firmly on his own feet. On the contrary the *Fifth Symphony* seems to me on repeated hearings to be the consummation of his career and the final solution of the problems he has always set himself. Admittedly he has done here what he has often tried to do before. But so wise and profound a solution could have been arrived at only after the relatively deliberate, even self-conscious, experiments towards a contemporary idiom.

It is very significant that the work is a symphony which adheres fairly closely to the classical framework. It is the measure of Vaughan Williams's final achievement that his own type of rhapsodic modal lyrical invention now develops, within that framework, with complete conviction and apparent spontaneity. Even the persistent flattened sevenths assume a structural and harmonic significance in that they produce a tonal ambiguity which is exploited in the formal design; and that the sevenths appear in the epilogue more or less consistently in their sharpened form creates a feeling of ultimate consummation and resolution which is not fully intelligible except in reference to the ground-plan of the whole composition. A fairly clear example of the extraordinarily subtle way in which Vaughan Williams effects a reconciliation of his habitual technique of modal arabesque (really vocal and monodic in origin) with the potentialities of sonata development is provided by the very original use which he makes, in the development section of the first movement, of the Sibelian string *moto perpetuo* in order to achieve a cumulative climax. Vaughan Williams's use of the sonata structure is here contemplative rather than dramatic, as the nature of the technical undertaking inevitably implied; but it is a perfectly legitimate and convincing modification of the more customary procedure.

Both the Scherzo and the last movement are rigorously formalized organisms, the last movement a concentrated passacaglia deriving from the Elizabethan variation technique, the Scherzo and trio a quintessence of the Vaughan Williams 'rustic' dance, now objectified with a luminous precision, so that the music has a curiously moving quality, at once earthy and other-worldly. The texture of the work throughout is entrancingly beautiful; as trans-

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parently clear, in its utterly different convention, as late Stravinsky. And that I have mentioned Stravinsky reminds one of a further point; that the technical clarity and polish which Vaughan Williams here attains is not merely the expression of the ripeness of his maturity but also evidence of the way in which he has made possible an environment in which young composers could once more take their Englishness for granted and set about the discovery of professional standards and effective stylizations. Young composers in England to-day may not find Vaughan Williams's music altogether congenial to their outlook; but to him they must all experience a sense of deep gratitude. Vaughan Williams's ultimate solution of his problems is something that one must attribute not merely to great technical skill and maturity but to a strength of *character* and moral fibre without which that technical maturity could not, in such unpropitious circumstances, have been arrived at. The *Fifth Symphony*, we are told, is founded on material from a projected opera on Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* which the composer had had in mind for many years but eventually abandoned. That Vaughan Williams looked back to the seventeenth century when (for social and economic reasons) the English operatic venture failed, that he should have brooded for so many years over the figure of John Bunyan, and that he should finally have produced his *Pilgrim's Progress* in symphonic, not operatic form, is extremely revealing. Of course it has always been clear that there was a relationship between Vaughan Williams and Bunyan, for his peasant simplicity and subtlety, his concern for the English language whether in words or melody, his love for the inflexions of the Authorised Version and for the humanistic aspects of the Christian religion which Bunyan incarnated with such profound beauty on behalf of the common man, are his by inheritance. But there is more to it than that. The English peasant as exemplified in folk-song must alas be regarded as a back-number; but the Bunyan tradition, as exemplified in Bunyan himself, in Winstanley and Lilbourne, with their magnificent prose and their concern for the dignity of every man, whatever his estate, in the sight of the Lord, is something that is full of meaning for us at the present day. We are not often privileged to share in the expression of a spirit which breathes the same air, as it were, as Bunyan and Winstanley, but when we do we can recognize it as something in no way remote from our most urgent preoccupations. The work is impregnated with that Christian Puritanism which ultimately played its part in producing the chaos of the modern world; but it is that Puritanism as full of beauty, humanism, charity and hope for the future as it was in the eyes of Bunyan and Lilbourne, before it soured into commercialism and industry. In the serene aria of the symphony's slow movement, with its unexpectedly restless development which, reflecting perhaps some passage in Bunyan's text, seems also to suggest how such assurance may, in the contemporary world, take a lifetime to attain, we find a profound 'religious' conviction which is paralleled in no other English music of to-day except possibly a few passages in the sym-

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phonies of Rubbra, which are, of course, much less closely in contact with a Christian tradition. It is music imbued with what one can only call greatness of soul, and if we who are younger feel that it is not altogether 'our' kind of music, we nonetheless respect and love it as a great English classic which is not only the consummation of the lifetime's work of a great and good man, but which is also of much more immediate relevance to us as musicians and members of society than might superficially appear.

This is clear I think when we turn to the generation of composers following Vaughan Williams and look particularly at the music of Tippett and Britten. Tippett's oratorio, *A Child of our Time,* though not specifically Christian, is a profoundly religious work; in the text, which Tippett wrote himself, he transforms a (true) modern story of persecution into a kind of modern myth. He takes up the religious-social issues at the point where they lapsed in the seventeenth century; and he takes up the problem of the relation between musical line and speech at the point where it lapsed also. His treatment of the voice is imbued with the authentic Purcellian flavour, and his recitative is one of the most beautiful and convincing solutions of the speech-lyricism opposition in all English music. The rhythmic flexibility of Purcell in declamation and of the Elizabethan madrigal in concerted work, combined with the ellipses and contortions of jazz which sensitively handled give the flavour of twentieth-century speech, great harmonic fluidity melodically derived from a diatonic and modal base, these are the foundations of his music which does not need to insist on its Englishness because it is centrally English in its relation to the spoken language and in its ethical-religious preoccupations. And alongside all this one finds in a much more sophisticated form than in Vaughan Williams, the concern for formal organization imposed on the material by the struggle of the individual sensibility, such as makes the final works of Beethoven still one of the fundamental manifestations of the contemporary consciousness. The evolutionary flowering of lyrical lines characteristic of Elizabethan polyphony, the concern for speech accent typical of Purcell, and the 'individual' organization of late Beethoven together indicate, in such a work as the second quartet, how for most serious contemporary musicians a comprehensive relation to musical history is essential if the composer is to achieve the merging of his sophisticated self-consciousness once more into spontaneous creation. Such an attempt inevitably means a sense of struggle which is implicit in all Tippett's music even when, as in the piano sonata, it seems most glitteringly gay. It also means that he will not arrive easily or quickly at mature realization, and while I think that *A Child of Our Time* is among the half-dozen or so most moving and important works written by an Englishman in the twentieth century, I would not say that it was an unqualified success. (For instance exquisitely and sensitively as they are arranged, I am not sure that the negro spirituals really fulfil a function comparable with that of the Lutheran chorales in Bach's cantatas; musically because, despite the jazz influence

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throughout, the transition from the rhythmic and harmonic complexities of Tippett's polyphony to the spirituals is not completely convincing; philosophically because the persecuted negro is too topical and local a symbol to serve adequately for persecuted humanity). There is a feeling both of exuberance, and of strain, in Tippett's terrific rhythmic vitality; the strain is gradually being superseded by fluency in a wholly good (creative) sense. And highly as I think of Tippett's music up to the present I feel convinced that the music which he will create during the next ten years will mark as big a development as the works of the present manifest when compared with the works he wrote a decade or so ago. I think it will prove historically important that he has an innate dramatic gift such as Vaughan Williams has in the main dispensed with: now that he is tackling the symphonic problem we may await the result with the liveliest anticipation.

Fluency has never been Britten's problem; indeed there was a time when it was pretty generally thought that his fluency (in a bad sense) might destroy him. What troubled me about the early works was the disproportion between their technical facility and their emotional development so that the result was adolescent in effect, like so much of Auden's poetry. *A Boy was Born* was a 'young' work of great virginal charm and tenderness, but it was not adolescent; obviously it was the creation of a youth of really remarkable talent and sensitivity. The fault of the series of 'witty' works that followed it was not that they were witty but simply that the wit wasn't good—emotionally mature—enough. Yet even these early pieces have in restrospect an importance greater perhaps than their intrinsic value. Britten's professional competence, his sense of stylization, his virtuoso qualities, were extremely important at a time when these things were hard to come by in English music, because without clearly defined professional standards such as had existed in pre-Hitler Germany in a more or less continuous tradition from Bach to Richard Strauss, one cannot hope for a non-provincial outlook or ultimately for any organic relation between the composer and his audience (since for there to be such the audience must accept the composer as a professional craftsman, with a job to do, like other men). The apparent oddity—for an English composer—of the influences in Britten's music—particularly that of late Mahler which with its expanded intervals and orchestral translucency is noticeable not only in the *Sinfonia da Requiem* but as early as the slow sections of the string orchestra *Variations*—are seen to be part of a deliberate search for a stylized rhetoric which has gone on more or less continuously until the tenor *Serenade* (Rubbra is perhaps the only one of our composers who seems to have attained a very high standard of professional craftsmanship without the need to 'invent' a stylization). In this way Britten seems to be solving the problems implicit in his eclecticism as his teacher Frank Bridge in his creative work didn't; needless to say the increasing singlemindedness and clarity in the realization of this rhetorical stylization parallels a development in Britten's sensibility. The danger of the method is that it is

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easy to let the instruments—the virtuoso exploitation of them—do the work of the music; moral integrity is precisely what Britten is rapidly acquiring, and while he has always had a superb sense of the theatre and of showmanship, I think it is probable that the new opera will reveal him as a *dramatic* composer too.

I think it would hardly be an exaggeration to say that Britten's development has been almost the exact inverse of Tippett's. Tippett started very tentatively and his career has been a continual probing outwards, an exploration intended to comprehend and reconcile ever more elements of his complex sensibility. Tippett's work is based on a struggle between spontaneous creativity and the modern self-consciousness in which each side must be accorded its rights. In Britten's work there is no struggle; he early acquired a virtuoso command of many—one nearly said all—stylizations; in his development he has learned to purge his language of extraneous elements, to make the stylization completely subservient to a musical purpose. This is the same as saying that he has learned what this purpose is, learned to know that his sensibility is not 'knowing' at all, not 'clever', but essentially and in the best sense innocent. Such innocence in the diatonic fluidity and limpidity of the St. Cecilia piece, in the last movement of the string quartet, in the tenor *Serenade*, in the *Ceremony of Carols* and even in the little *Festival Cantata*, is ultimately inseparable from great technical competence because only through such competence can genuinely innocent—that is fresh—feeling be incarnated in sound with honesty and precision; if the technique fumbles the feeling will too, and vice versa. Thus it is that Britten's innocence and competence seem to me important not only for himself but for future generations of English composers. We desperately need a widespread recognition of the truth that Erik Satie so clearly realized, namely that innocence of spirit is the very opposite of all that is vague and inexact. And the more such springlike creativity there is in the world the less difficult and arduous is the 'struggle' of a composer like Tippet—or maybe later Britten himself—going to be. It is in this way that I think it is true to say that between them Britten and Tippett hold the key to the future of our musical culture (great composer though he is, Rubbra is perhaps more isolated from the central trend).

It remains to add that the scores listed above are all finely printed and elegantly produced and are all cheap at the price. The records—particularly the Vaughan Williams—are easily the most important the British Council have produced, and performances and recordings are as usual excellent. A subscription recording of Tippett's *Double String Concerto* is being issued by Schotts, and readers who would like the records are advised to send their names and addresses to Messrs. Schott, 48, Great Marlborough Street, W.1, without delay. We are also promised records of Britten's Tenor *Serenade*. But we still lack a Rubbra symphony.

W. H. MELLERS.

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'PHÈDRE'

'L'ENTRAÎNEMENT de notre misérable nature humaine n'a jamais été plus mis à nu'. Sainte-Beuve's shrewd comment on *Phèdre* explains very well the change that was taking place in Racine's approach to contemporary problems. In his earlier plays he had shown himself the critic of an age of false stability. He had recorded the disintegration of a society whose spiritual life was being strangled by a ruthless despotism; he had probed the maladies of the individual soul, had exposed the brittleness of honour and morality in conflict with sexual passion; but his own attitude had remained one of detachment. He had not troubled about constructive solutions and was undisturbed by the disregard for moral sanctions in the world that he had portrayed. In *Bérénice*—the only one of the mature tragedies in which 'honour' triumphs over 'love'—the poet's palpable disbelief in the values invoked drove him to strange lengths to impose on others convictions that he did not hold himself. It is this that makes the verse of the play seem hollow and inflated. At bottom it is a curious *tour de force*. Racine hovers on the verge of a very personal sentimentality and only his extreme virtuosity prevents him from succumbing to it.

Phèdre belongs to a transitional period in his life. It reveals a deepening of experience; it is richer and more complex than any of its predecessors and the sustained magnificence of its verse is not surpassed even in *Athalie*. In spite of the pagan setting and an unmistakable complicity in this magnificent study of sexual mania, there is some ground for Lemaître's view that it was the first step in Racine's religious conversion. It does show a concern for moral values which is new in his poetry and it is shot through and through with the doctrines of predestination and original sin. Destiny broods darkly over the play and the motifs of *race* and *sang* are constantly recurring. Phèdre and Hippolyte are the children of parents who were the victims of guilty passion and Jansenist theology is enlisted to show the hopelessness of the struggle against heredity and fate without the intervention of grace.

Racine uses the design that had become familiar in his other plays—the triangle in which A pursues B who is desperately in love with C. His contemporaries found it difficult to understand why he had so far departed from tradition as to give Hippolyte a lover and his frivolous explanation that it was to prevent Hippolyte from being suspected of the fashionable 'Italian tastes' could scarcely satisfy them. In reality, this innovation enabled Racine not only to contrast two forms of love, but also to throw fresh light on the tragic nature of sexual passion. He emphasises the difference between 'innocent' and 'guilty' love, and the Christian view of sin and temptation is fully apparent in the lines:

> Grâces au ciel, mes mains ne sont point criminelles.
> Plût aux dieux que mon *coeur* fût *innocent* comme elles!

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Le jour n'est pas plus *pur* que le fond de mon *coeur,*
Et l'on veut qu'Hippolyte, épris d'un feu *profane* . . .

It is still more strongly marked in Phèdre's:

Ne pense pas qu'au moment que je t'aime,
Innocente à mes yeux, je m'approuve moi-même,
Ni que du fol amour qui trouble ma raison
Ma lâche complaisance ait nourri le poison.

which suggests already that Phèdre's guilty conscience plays its part in her downfall.

Racine had become so obsessed by the Jansenist sense of the inherent sinfulness of sexual love that even Hippolyte's love for Aricie is described as *un fol amour,* as the aberration of his *sens égarés.* It leads to disaster as surely as Phèdre's incestuous passion, but to assume that he is destroyed merely because he abandons the role ascribed to him by tradition is to underrate the subtlety of Racine's interpretation. The view underlying the play is that once a 'limit' has been passed, once weakness or wickedness has entered into the human heart, it can never be cast out again and nothing can stop its ravages. This is felt strongly by Phèdre and Hippolyte who both realize too late that the limit has been passed:

Il n'est plus temps. Il sait mes ardeurs insensées.
De l'austère pudeur les *bornes* sont passées.

Quiconque a pu franchir les *bornes légitimes*
Peut violer enfin les droits les plus sacrés.

This applies to the 'innocent' as well as to the 'guilty'. Hippolyte is described more than once as *l'insensible Hippolyte* and it is precisely his 'insensibility' that provides the best protection against the furious passions which are unleashed among those who surround him. The stoic ideal, however, is a negative one and Hippolyte is fully conscious of its inadequacy. As soon as his father is reported to be dead he moves away from it towards something more positive and more human. His feelings for Aricie lead to a relaxation of his father's prohibition against her marrying and when he tells her:

La Grèce me reproche une mère étrangère.
Mais, si pour concurrent je n'avais que mon frère,
Madame, j'ai sur lui de véritables *droits*
Que je saurais sauver du caprice des *lois*.

—there is a distinction between *droits* and *lois,* between natural human 'rights' and inhuman 'laws'. The distinction is a vital one and it runs all through Racine's work. In his earlier plays he had exposed the weaknesses of an order which had ceased to be a true order and degenerated into mere 'legalism', into the external observance of empty formulas. In *Phèdre* the criticism becomes subtler and more searching. The dilemma lies in the fact that though 'laws' are incapable of providing a constructive solution of the problems

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which confronted Racine's contemporaries, they were the only barrier against anarchy. Once a 'law', however 'capricious', was set aside, the way was open to confusion and disorder. This is brought home by the tragic accents of Phèdre's declaration:

> Moi, régner! Moi, ranger un État sous ma *loi,*
> Quand ma faible raison ne règne plus sur moi,
> Lorsque j'ai de mes sens abandonné l'empire,
> Quand sous un joug honteux à peine je respire . . .

The choice lies between legalism and disaster, between an 'insensibility' which excludes natural 'rights' and the 'shameful yoke'. In a tragic world the person who desires no more than his natural human rights follows the road to destruction. Thésée forbade Aricie to marry because she came of contaminated 'blood'. Hippolyte's relaxation of his father's prohibition is tantamount to an infringement of 'law' which at once involves him in the intrigues that are going on around him. The maxim, as always in Racine, is that there is not and cannot be a middle course which offers security and honour.

One of the most interesting things about the play is the symbolism of light and darkness. 'Je voulais', cries Phèdre,

> Je voulais en mourant prendre soin de ma gloire,
> Et dérober au jour une flamme si noire . . .

Flamme is normally a symbol of light, a guide in darkness; when used to describe love it is also a symbol of life, but in making *flamme noire* a fresh significance is given to it. Light is turned into darkness, life itself into death. There is a great deal in the play about Thésée's exploits in the pagan hell where he has gone to help a friend carry off Pluto's spouse. It seems at first as though these references are a concession to legend, are mere classical ornament; but when we look at the texts we find that they have a far more important function and are closely linked with Racine's interest in darkness. There may be a contrast betwen the pagan hell from which men could escape and the real hell of spiritual and emotional torment from which there is no escape. But there is something more besides. Ismène tells Aricie that Thésée

> . . . a vu le Cocyte et les rivages *sombres,*
> Et s'est montré vivant aux infernales *ombres* . . .

And Aricie replies:

> Croirai-je qu'un mortel avant sa dernière heure
> Peut pénétrer des morts la *profonde* demeure?

Thésée himself refers to the exploit in similar terms:

> Moi-même, il m'enferma dans des cavernes *sombres,*
> Lieux *profonds* et voisins de l'empire des *ombres.*

The word *ombres* is one of the focal words of the play because it is a symbol at once of 'imprisonment' and 'refuge'. When, for example, Phèdre cries:

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Dieux! que ne suis-je assise à *l'ombre* des forêts!

the cool, leafy green of the forests offers a prospect of escape from her trouble; but though it brings a moment of release from the torments of passion, it is an illusion. It is the struggle of the trapped animal to escape, but there can be no escape from the interior torment which pursues the victim into the shady refuge:

Dans *le fond des forêts* votre image me suit;
La *lumière* du jour, les *ombres* de la nuit,
Tout retrace à mes yeux les charmes que j'évite,
Tout vous livre à l'envi le rebelle Hippolyte.

'When', wrote Taine, 'Hippolyte speaks of the forests where his youth was spent, we must understand the avenues of Versailles'. It is a strange assumption which ruins the meaning of the play. In Racine's life-time a large part of France was covered by real forests and one of them actually extended to the outskirts of the village of La Ferté-Milon where he was born. France was not a vast Versailles, a country of trim gardens and shady walks. It was a country in which a few towns were surrounded by belts of forest, a country in which a high degree of civilization was surrounded by the darkness of the uncivilized provinces. Now this corresponds exactly to the view of human nature that we find in Racine's plays. Human nature was highly reasonable and well-balanced up to a point, but men were becoming increasingly aware of the psychological *hinterland,* the hidden motives that played a decisive part in human actions. The philosophers, moralists and dramatists made common cause in the attempt to penetrate into this psychological jungle. No one was more aware than Racine of what to-day is called the 'unconscious' and his aim was to probe the obscure regions of the mind which are constantly suggested by the phrases *l'empire des ombres, le fond des forêts* and others which are still more significant.

The ambiguity which surrounds 'forests' heightens the tragic urgency of the poetry and is characteristic of the whole play. All the chief characters are the victims of two conflicting impulses—the impulse to conceal their true motives from themselves, to force them into the unconscious and to seal them up by using phrases like *le fond des forêts* or *l'empire des ombres,* and the impulse to bring them out into the open by confession. The first of these impulses is illustrated by Aricie's declaration of her love for Hippolyte:

Non que, par les yeux seuls lâchement enchantée,
J'aime en lui sa beauté, sa grâce tant vantée ,
Présents dont la nature a voulu l'honorer,
Qu'il méprise lui-même, et qu'il semble ignorer.
J'aime, je prise en lui de plus nobles richesses,
Les vertus de son père, et non point les faiblesses.
J'aime, je l'avoûrai, cet orgueil généreux
Qui jamais n'a fléchi sous le joug amoureux.
Phèdre en vain s'honorait des soupirs de Thésée:

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Pour moi, je suis plus fière, et fuis la gloire aisée
D'arracher un hommage à mille autres offert,
Et d'entrer dans un coeur de toutes parts ouvert.
Mais de faire fléchir un courage inflexible,
De porter la douleur dans une âme insensible,
D'enchaîner un captif de ses fers étonné,
Contre un joug qui lui plaît vainement mutiné :
C'est là ce que je veux, et c'est là ce qui m'irrite.
Hercule à désarmer coûtait moins qu'Hippolyte,
Et vaincu plus souvent, et plus tôt surmonté,
Préparait moins de gloire aux yeux qui l'ont dompté.

The impress of Jansenism is clearly seen in these lines. Aricie's disclaimer that she is attracted by Hippolyte's physical beauty is perfectly sincere; she does not know that an unconscious fear of physical love is making her hide her real feelings. There is a certain satisfaction in the reference to his beauty which is already suspect and Aricie's true feelings become abundantly clear as the passage develops. The minx peeps out from behind the solemn puritan.

One of the most fascinating figures in Racine's plays is the predatory female who pursues the reluctant male.

Il s'oppose à l'amour un coeur inaccessible :
Cherchons, pour l'attaquer, un endroit plus sensible.

cries Phèdre, and Aricie's sentiments are no different. She is spurred on by the love of the hunt, by the desire to make a conquest of some one who is reputed to be insensible to feminine charms. *Gloire* is something very different from the Cornelian glory; in its present context it means no more than success in the chase—the satisfaction of outdistancing one's 'rival'. Aricie does not think of the pursuit in terms of a goal or of 'domestic happiness' any more than the equally demure Atalide in *Bajazet;* she thinks of it in terms of 'romance'. It is not merely possession that she desires; she wants to dominate Hippolyte, to make him feel the *douleur* of love, to captivate a warrior with 'chains' so that all resistance becomes vain. It is characteristic of these 'hunts' that they always end in the destruction of the unhappy male. The female is bent on domination and subjection, and the innocent-looking word *fléchi* has a sinister inflection. In Racine's plays the female exhausts the male and sucks his vitality out of him.

As Racine's genius ripened, he became a pastmaster of the art of revealing the true feelings of his characters which were concealed underneath the elaborate psychological subterfuges constructed by them, and this highly personal form of ambiguity became a persistent feature of his style.

The 'innocent' lovers try to hide their feelings, but the 'guilty' lover feels impelled to confide in some one. The role of Phèdre seems at first to be one long confession; but in reality there are three distinct confessions and all of them serve different purposes. The confession to Oenone is due partly to the need of ridding herself of

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a crushing sense of guilt and partly to the need of obtaining practical assistance. The confession to Hippolyte himself is intended to break down his resistance; only the final confession to Thésée is disinterested, is a belated attempt to expiate a wrong.

The nature of the conflict between the need to confess and the desire to conceal can be seen in the symbolical utterance that precedes the great speech in Act I, Scene 3:

> Que ces vains ornements, que ces voiles me pèsent!
> Quelle importune main, en formant tous ces noeuds,
> A pris soin sur mon front d'assembler mes cheveux?
> Tout m'afflige et me nuit, et conspire à me nuire.

The constraint suggested by *noeuds* is so vividly felt that the long confession which follows brings with it an immense sense of deliverance. The opening words—

> Mon mal vient de plus loin.

—set the tone of the passage. We feel Phèdre groping dimly in the subterranean depths of her mind. The word *mal*—the realization that she is a sick woman—is a talisman which sets the complicated mental processes in movement and the guilty secrets seem to burst out of her. The whole passage is a definition of her *mal* and as it develops, her malady is dissolved into its component parts. *Éperdue* and *égarée* are stages on the way which follow one another logically. I have discussed the passage at some length in another place.[1] It is sufficient to remark here that as it unfolds, Phèdre's state of mind undergoes a complete change and that just as there are stages within the passage, so the passage itself is a complete stage in the unfolding of the play.

From this we can turn to the famous declaration of love in Act II, Scene 5:

> Oui, Prince, je languis, je brûle pour Thésée.
> Je l'aime, non point tel que l'ont vu les enfers,
> Volage adorateur de mille objets divers
> Qui va du dieu des morts déshonorer la couche;
> Mais fidèle, mais fier, et même un peu farouche,
> Charmant, jeune, traînant tous les coeurs après soi,
> Tel qu'on dépeint nos dieux, ou tel que je vous voi.
> Il avait votre port, vos yeux, votre langage,
> Cette noble pudeur colorait son visage,
> Lorsque de notre Crète il traversa les flots,
> Digne sujet des voeux des filles de Minos.
> Que faisiez-vous alors? Porquoi sans Hippolyte
> Des héros de la Grèce assembla-t-il l'élite? . . .
> Par vous aurait péri le monstre de la Crète,
> Malgré tous les détours de sa vaste retraite.
> Pour en développer l'embarras incertain,

[1] *Scrutiny*, Vol. VI, No. 4, pp. 454-6.

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Ma soeur du fil fatal eût armé votre main.
Mais non, dans ce dessein je l'aurais devancée:
L'amour m'en eût d'abord inspiré la pensée.
C'est moi, Prince, c'est moi dont l'utile secours
Vous eût du Labyrinthe enseigné les détours.
Que de soins m'eût coûté cette tête charmante!
Un fil n'eût point assez rassuré votre amante.
Compagne du péril qu'il vous fallait chercher,
Moi-même devant vous j'aurais voulu marcher;
Et Phèdre, au Labyrinthe avec vous descendue,
Se serait avec vous retrouvée, ou perdue.

One's first impression is that Phèdre has deliberately abandoned any further attempt to conceal the nature of her feelings for Hippolyte and that the ambiguity of her speech is a trick to make him listen to her *déclaration*. There is nothing here of the minx's satisfaction over catching a man who is reputed to be indifferent to all women. Her attitude is that of an experienced woman who is determined to find her way to the bed of a young man who has never known woman and for this reason she dwells on his *noble pudeur*. Her feelings are frankly sexual and there is a rapt ecstatic note in her description of his physical beauty, in the soft, caressing

Charmant, jeune, traînant tous les coeurs après soi

or in the weary sigh that one detects in

Que de soins m'eût coûté cette tête charmante!

While there is no doubt that Phèdre does wish to seduce Hippolyte, this impression is only partly correct. The speech is far more than an impassioned declaration of love and Phèdre's tactics are far from being carefully and deliberately calculated. In reality, the confession is torn from her in spite of herself and this gives it its peculiar intensity. The more we study the passage the more conscious we become that Phèdre is speaking in a trance in which she betrays her innermost feelings. She is aware of what she is doing, but is powerless to stop herself. It is along these lines that the explanation must be sought.[z]

The Labyrinth of the Minotaur is evoked because it is the perfect expression of Phèdre's feelings. It is a far more complex image than the 'palaces' of the earlier plays and its *détours* have a deeper significance. The Labyrinth is at once objective and subjective. Phèdre would like to see Hippolyte trapped by the Minotaur—trapped and helpless—so that she could rescue him and win his love. It is a romantic dream, but it is also an astonishing piece of psychological symbolism. We are all familiar with the extravagances of the psycho-analytical critics, but this seems to me to be one of the very few instances in great literature where the Freudian

[z] *cf.* Que dis-je? Cet aveu que je te viens de faire,
Cet aveu si honteux, le crois-tu volontaire?

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symbols offer a complete explanation. There is no need to dwell on the meaning of the 'descent', the guiding 'thread' or the more obvious significance of the Labyrinth itself, beyond remarking that the whole passage is an allegory of the sexual act, an allegory which is driven home by the extraordinary

> C'est moi, Prince, c'est moi dont l'utile secours
> Vous eût du Labyrinthe enseigné les détours.

where the focus of the picture suddenly becomes sharp and the general erotic associations at the beginning of the passage crystallise and are concentrated on a particular relationship between two individuals.

It is precisely in the use of symbols that Phèdre's state of mind resembles a trance or dream. The Labyrinth is the labyrinth of our hidden desires, a region beyond the normal range of human intercourse and therefore outside the conventional tabus. It is a labyrinth in which Phèdre is herself a prisoner, but it offers a prospect of gratifying illicit desires. She is anxious to see Hippolyte trapped in the same prison; she wants to make him fall in love with her or possibly to show him that, without knowing it, he is already in love with her. The obstacle is not only his 'insensibility'; it is also his relationship with her which is a tabu that can only be overcome in the labyrinth, in the place which is 'beyond good and evil'. Phèdre sees that their difficulty is a common one which can only be solved in partnership and her excitement is perhaps heightened by the thought that it is a partnership of guilt. It is only by working together that they can find their way out of the labyrinth; they are joined by a bond which must bring either ecstatic happiness or complete destruction:

> Et Phèdre, au Labyrinthe *avec vous* descendue,
> Se serait *avec vous* retrouvée, ou perdue.

This extraordinary fantasy provides Phèdre with a vicarious satisfaction, but the ultimate goal eludes her. The *perdue* marks the passing of the trance and the return to the actual world with its shattering sense of disillusionment which is underlined by Hippolyte's shocked but prosaic:

> Dieux! qu'est-ce que j'entends? Madame, oubliez-vous
> Que Thésée est mon père, et qu'il est votre époux?

The effectiveness of the scene as a whole lies in the contrast between the speech discussed above and the one that follows:

> Ah! cruel, tu m'as trop entendue.
> Je t'en ai dit assez pour te tirer d'erreur.
> Hé bien! connais donc Phèdre et toute sa fureur.
> J'aime. Ne pense pas qu'au moment que je t'aime,
> Innocente à mes yeux je m'approuve moi-même,
> Ni que du fol amour qui trouble ma raison
> Ma lâche complaisance ait nourri le poison.

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Although there is no lowering of the tension, although Phèdre suddenly switches to what Mauriac calls the *tutoiement passionné*, it is clear that she is speaking on a different plane. The world of erotic fantasy has dissolved. She looks at her love with the eyes of an ordinary moral citizen and condemns the rapture of a moment ago as a *fol amour qui trouble ma raison*. The references to *raison, innocente* and *lâche complaisance* imply a belief in a clearly defined moral order, but—this is the tragedy—it does not enable Phèdre to dominate her emotions. In all Racine's plays, passion is destiny and reason is powerless to resist the swirls of passion. The honesty and lucidity with which Phèdre faces the implications of the situation and her recognition of the code which she has outraged are characteristic of seventeenth-century literature.

The movement of the play as of all Racine's work is a destructive movement. The human personality is shattered by its own passions and the play closes with its total dislocation. The false report that Thésée is dead raises Phèdre's hopes for a moment; in spite of her rebuff by Hippolyte she is led on by the thought that her love is no longer illicit and may be satisfied. The violence of passion is increased by the simultaneous discovery that Thésée is living and that Hippolyte is in love with Aricie. The terrible clarity with which these discoveries are registered in Phèdre's mind throw a good deal of light on the tragic process. When she says

Mon époux est vivant, et moi je brûle encore!

the activity implied by *brûler* is felt to be morally wrong and physically destructive. It puts an immense strain on the human personality which rapidly disintegrates. The violence of the 'fire' which eats up life is contrasted with the decorous domestic feelings which should be felt by a wife of Phèdre's age for her husband, and which are alone compatible with 'living'. The exasperation and frustration of unrequited passion have seldom been more powerfully expressed than in the terrible line:

Hippolyte est sensible, et ne sent rien pour moi!

It is a wonderful example of Racine's gift of condensation. The fondness of the seventeenth century for the word *sensible* was characteristic of a highly refined society which was acutely conscious not only of its most intimate feelings, but also of the constant shift and change of those feelings. Racine's sense of language enabled him to set his personal stamp on the word and to enrich its meaning. For Phèdre has become so acutely *sensible* that the disappointment of her hopes of physical satisfaction make the sense of bodily frustration unbearable. Her brooding on the intimate details of the satisfaction derived by another plunges her into a fresh orgy of sexual fantasy:

Ah! douleur non encore éprouvée!
A quel nouveau tourment je me suis réservée!
Tout ce que j'ai souffert, mes craintes, mes transports,

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La fureur de mes feux, l'horreur de mes remords,
Et d'un refus cruel l'insupportable injure,
N'était qu'un faible essai du tourment que j'endure.
Ils s'aiment! Par quel charme ont-ils trompé mes yeux?
Comment se sont-ils vus? Depuis quand? Dans quels lieux? . . .
De leur furtive ardeur ne pouvais-tu m'instruire?
Les a-t-on vu souvent se parler, se chercher?
Dans le fond des forêts allaient-ils se cacher?
Hélas! ils se voyaient avec pleine licence.
Le ciel de leurs soupirs approuvait l'innocence;
Ils suivaient sans remords leur penchant amoureux;
Tous les jours se levaient clairs et sereins pour eux.
Et moi, triste rebut de la nature entière,
Je me cachais au jour, je fuyais la lumière.
La mort est le seul dieu que j'osais implorer.

The poignancy of this passage lies in the sense of frustration and waste.[3] The activity signified by *craintes, fureur,* and *horreur* has been in vain; the reward has gone to another. The situation has undergone a change since the reflections on the labyrinth in Act II and this passage only yields its full flavour when seen in relation to the earlier one. The first passage derives its power from its sense of hot, guilty intimacy; the second from an agonising sense of exclusion from intimacy which is heightened by the knowledge of other people's enjoyment of it. Hippolyte and Aricie are united in a real forest (as distinct from the fanciful Labyrinth) and are beyond Phèdre's reach. The darkness of the forest prevents her from seeing them and their actions can only be the subject of unhealthy imaginings. One of the most curious things about the passage is the use of the words *innocence, licence* and *penchant*. The idea of love has become for Phèdre inseparable from the idea of sin. The ardour of Hippolyte and Aricie is therefore *furtive,* and though the logical sense of *licence* is innocent, there is clearly a suggestion—perhaps an unconscious suggestion—of moral licence. Nor can we have any doubts about the implications of *se chercher*. It is a reflection on Phèdre's state of mind that though she associates love with sin, she is particularly fascinated by the lovers who (she implies) are innocent in the sense that this is 'the first time' and who provide a 'thrill' to the jaded senses of the ageing Amazon. The words *licence* and *penchant* are deliberately ambiguous. They suggest freedom, but it is a freedom for others; it brings Phèdre a vicarious satisfaction at the same time as it intensifies her sense of personal inhibition. The line

Ils suivaient sans remords leur penchant amoureux

reveals the subtle temptation, which is always present to the minds of Racine's heroines, to throw off all restraint—to throw off the veneer of civilization and give full rein to instincts that are by no

[3] *cf.* J'ai langui, j'ai séché dans les feux, dans les larmes.

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means civilized. The word *remords* is of particular interest. It indicates a moral barrier which ought to have arrested Phèdre's downward course; but it is no barrier for the innocent lovers who are free to follow the incline which is fatal to Phèdre. Instead of this, 'remorse' has merely poisoned her pleasure and incensed her against the others. The most painful thing in the passage is Phèdre's sense of *physical* separation which is heightened by her consciousness of *moral* ostracism. When she describes herself as *triste rebut de la nature entière,* moral as well as physical exclusion is implied which brings a sudden numbing sense of the annihilation of all feeling, the dissolution of all moral values. The activity of the senses does not lead to life and companionship as it should, but to death and exile. The 'clear' and 'serene' skies grow dark. Phèdre recoils before life and turns to face death. *'Fuyons',* she cries,

> Fuyons dans la nuit infernale.

With the confession of her jealousy, the evolution of Phèdre's character is virtually complete. Although the brief confession to Thésée is in a sense an expiation, its main function is to round off the play:

> Déjà jusqu'à mon coeur le venin parvenu
> Dans ce coeur expirant jette un froid inconnu;
> Déjà je ne vois plus qu'à travers un nuage
> Et le ciel, et l'époux que ma présence outrage;
> Et la mort, à mes yeux dérobant la clarté,
> Rend au jour, qu'ils souillaient, toute sa pureté.

In these lines physical extinction, with its deliberate emphasis on the heart as the seat of the passions, is seen to be the consummation of the interior disintegration of Phèdre's personality. The removal of the corrupt element leads to a restoration of a sane order. The skies clear; 'purity' is once more supreme.

Phèdre is not Racine's last word on contemporary problems. In spite of the part played by religion he was primarily concerned with the fate of the individual soul and made no attempt to see the individual in relation to society as a whole. The order that is restored is a metaphysical order and is defined in terms of 'the great abstractions'. For though there is much in this play about 'innocence', 'purity' and 'sin', one feels that there is something timid and shrinking about the virtue which prompts Aricie to ask coyly whether she can run away with Hippolyte and Hippolyte himself to declare sententiously

> Arrachez-vous d'un lieu funeste et profané,
> Où la vertu respire un air empoisonné.

For the detailed application of these principles to the religious and political situation of Racine's day we have to wait for *Athalie,* his last and greatest play.

MARTIN TURNELL.

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J. B. LEISHMAN AND THE ART OF TRANSLATION[1]

THE publication of a translation of Hölderlin by the distinguished translator of Rilke is no small event, and since this book deserves close attention I intend to compare Leishman's versions with those of Michael Hamburger (reviewed in the Spring, 1944, number of *Scrutiny*). This is bound to be unfair to Mr. Hamburger whose translations are expressly meant to fulfil the functions of a crib rather than a re-creation, and I offer my apologies now for such misuse of his book. It is Leishman's rendering that is at present under review, and since he has something of an original talent for verse, a great advantage to the translator as well as a dangerous temptation, comparison with Hamburger's plain and usually honest versions is an excellent way of emphasizing both his successes and his failures. And I think I shall save space if I dispense with the appearance of a formal essay and deal with each point in note-form under the heading of the poem in which it occurs.

Der Mensch ('Man').

> When lo! on fairest isle, where untiring air
> Revolved in tender stillness around the grove,
> Warm night gone by, lay, grape-embowered,
> Born in the glimmering hour of daybreak,
> Once, Mother Earth, the fairest of all your brood . . .

As a crib this translation would be a failure of course; it is, in its own right, quite difficult verse. Compared with Hamburger's

> Then on the loveliest of the islands, where the air
> Was ever flowing with tender calm around the wood,
> Once, born in the morning's dawning hour,
> After a sultry night, there lay beneath
> The vines, O Mother Earth, thy loveliest child . . .

it offers the spirit of Hölderlin rather than the letter. But not entirely the spirit, either; 'the fairest of all your brood' is *not* a good translation of 'dein schönstes Kind'. To Hölderlin, 'Mother Earth' and 'Father Ether' were genuinely felt and well-nigh original conceptions with absolutely no hint of the ludicrous about them—it is curious how pompous much of Wordsworth's philosophical reflection seems after Hölderlin—but a reader unacquainted with the German poet's work might well consider his worst suspicions confirmed by a farmyard phrase like this:

> 'in gloomy shafts . . . will peer' is adequate for 'späht im Schacht', but Hamburger's 'looks around the pit' is pitifully inept;

[1] *Selected Poems of Friedrich Hœlderlin*, translated with Introduction and Notes by J. B. Leishman (The Hogarth Press, 8/6).

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no literal translation should make out that the banal phrase 'looks around' is equivalent to 'späht'.

'Und Waffen wider alle, die athmen, trägt . . . der Mensch': Hamburger is correct with 'And weapons against all who breathe Man bears with him', but Leishman has 'Arms, too, against all *breathers* will Man oppose'. This is Leishman's most serious and most frequent lapse: the arbitrary use of un-English constructions, portmanteau words and other clumsy devices. Examples are only too easy to find, often spoiling really fine passages: 'kindredly looks up' for 'sieht bekannt' (Hamburger's 'raises familiar eyes' is the obvious choice) in this same poem; 'retiringest petals', the one blot on an excellent rendering of *Hyperions Schiksaalslied;* 'dear blesser' and 'the peacefuller sun' in *My Portion;* 'the mournfullest dwelling-place' for 'das Haus der Trauernden' in *To Hope.* Similar blemishes mar his Rilke-translations—'with face that's even blissfuller' (*L'Ange du Méridien*).

Hyperions Schiksaalslied ('Hyperion's Song about Destiny').

To us though is given
To find no place for repose.
We fall and we vanish,
We suffering mortals,
Blindly from one hour
On to another,
As waters are hurtled
From boulder to boulder,
Down through the years to we know not where.

A translation could hardly approximate more nearly to the original than this. Hamburger's attempt,

But our lot it is
To rest at no place,
And suffering men
Dwindle and fall . . .

is written in lines each shorter than the original by one or two syllables and hence conveys an unpleasantly abrupt and quite inaccurate impression, more like falling down stairs than hurtling headlong through time.

Mein Eigentum ('My Portion').

Zu mächtig ach! ihr himmlischen Höhen zieht
Ihr mich empor; bei Stürmen, am heitern Tag
Fühl ich verzehrend euch im Busen
Wechseln, ihr wandelnden Götterkräfte.

Leishman gives

Too high, alas, Celestial Mountains, you
Uplift my heart! In storm and in shine I feel
Consumingly within my breast your
Sway, you divinely-transforming forces.

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But Hamburger translates 'ihr wandelnden Götterkräfte' as 'inconstant powers of gods'; since 'wandeln' can be transitive as well as reflexive, I think Leishman's is the likelier translation—Hölderlin never complained of the inconstancy of the gods ('Not all things at once does the Highest want'), and their powers of transformation is the chief subject of his verse.

I think, though, that 'holden Erinnerungen' is more aptly rendered as 'blissful memories' (Hamburger) than as Leishman's 'Kind Recollections', an expression which is somewhat reminiscent of the eighteenth-century pastoral-ruminative convention in English poetry; there is, as far as I am aware, no such suggestion about the German phrase.

An Die Hofnung ('To Hope').

'Hope, ever-gracious, kindly-industrious': another instance of Leishman's unnecessary use of awkward constructions. 'Gütiggeschäftige' is a legitimate German word, but the English language is not suited to the invention of compound adjectives, and it is far better to translate it simply as 'kind and active' (Hamburger); 'kindly-industrious' conveys a confused, unintegrated impression instead of a meaning. Similarly 'rurally-fairest' for 'ländlichschönste' in *Heidelberg*. On the other hand, however, Leishman's 'sacredly-sober' for 'heilignüchterne' (*Half of Life*) is not only permissible but essential, for when Hölderlin used this compound adjective it was not as a convenience which German grammar allowed him, but because only the two adjectives thus combined could convey the one definite meaning he had in mind. 'Sacredly-sober' has the further advantage of sounding pleasant to the ear.

Die Liebe ('Love').

'. . . by the genial ray matured': plain 'creative ray' would be better for 'schöpfrische Stral', I think. The adjective 'genial' reminds us, again, of the genteel landscape verse of such minor eighteenth-century poets as Dyer, Akenside and Warton—a slight point, yet one cannot over-emphasize the difference of kind between Hölderlin's feeling for nature and the dilettante idyllics of these writers. What a difference, one immediately realizes on reading Leishman's admirable translation (the first I have seen) of that fine poem, *Wie wenn am Feiertag*:

> And just as fire will glitter in that man's eyes
> Who has loftily conceived, so now,
> At signs and doings in the world to-day,
> Fire has been kindled anew in the souls of poets.
> And what has been before, though scarce perceived,
> Is only now revealed,
> And they who smilingly tilled our fields
> In servile garb, are known for what they are, the
> Life of all life, the gods' immortal powers.
>
> You ask for them? Their spirit breathes in Song,
> When from the daily sun and warming earth

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It springs, and from storms, both those in the air, and those
Which, longer brewing in the depths of time,
More oracular and more apprehensible to us,
Go straying between heaven and earth and among the peoples.
Quietly the thoughts of the general mind
Are ending in the soul of the poet:
Which, stricken of a sudden, known so long
To Infinitude, quivers with recollection,
And from it, enkindled thus by the sacred bolt,
That fruit in love begotten, that labour of gods and men,
Song, to bear lasting witness of both, will leap.

Der Abschied ('The Parting', Third Version).

The difference between a living reconstruction and a dead, if useful, translation is plain if you set the two versions of *Der Abschied* side by side. Leishman's rendering of this dramatic and unusually personal poem is as near perfect as possible; the sense is sufficiently exact, there are none of his ugly made-up words, and the verse has all the freshness and apparent spontaneity of a remarkable original composition. I should like to quote the poem in full, but one example will have to suffice:

and stealthily Custom
Can be stealing away the soul (Leishman)

and from us, day after day,
Always, usage exacts the soul (Hamburger)

Reif Sind, in Feuer Getaucht . . . ('Ripe, being plunged into fire . .').

Leishman has a good translation of a poem which indicates the change in Hölderlin's mental and poetic processes a little later to culminate in *Patmos*.

And most perversely,
Like horses, run the captured
Elements and ancient
Laws of earth.

'Perverse' is just the word for 'unrecht' in this context; Hamburger's 'unjustly, like horses' is, even within the very free logic of the poem, clearly absurd.

Menons Klagen um Diotima ('Menon's Laments for Diotima').

For sustained excellence Leishman's translation of the two great sequences, *Menons Klagen* and *Brot und Wein*, surpasses anything in his work on Rilke. The fourth stanza shows the high standard Leishman reaches throughout:

We, contentedly partnered, we like the amorous swans, who,
When they repose on the lake, when they are rocked on the waves,
Gaze in the water beneath where silvery clouds are reflected,
And the ethereal blue hovers below as they sail,

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Wended our ways on earth. And even though Boreas threatened,
Hater of lovers, lament ever preparing, and down
Fluttered the leaf from the bough and rain flew wide in the whirlblast,
We would tranquilly smile, feeling the god that was ours
Deep in our intimate talk, in the song of our single spirit,
Wholly at peace with ourselves, happy, like children, alone.
Ah, but desolate now my housel! My eye they have taken
From me, and all that I was, oh, I have lost it with her!
Wherefore I gropingly wander, and here like the shadows in Orcus
Linger, and all that remains long has seemed utterly vain.

It is little touches like 'Springs may flourish and fade, and season war upon season' in the third stanza, where Hamburger gives 'Indeed Springs go away, one year supplants the other' that go to make up Leishman's genius as a translator.

Der Rhein ('The Rhine').

An example of literal translation being less faithful than free translation:

But the lovers are
What they were before; they
Are at home where the flower is glad
Of harmless ardour and the spirit rustles
Around gloomy trees (Hamburger)

But lovers
Remain what they have been—those
Who are ever at home where the flower rejoices
In innocent warmth and the circling spirit
Rustles the sombre trees (Leishman)

Hamburger is literal in the common sense of the word, but here and elsewhere it is Leishman who is *truly* literal, taking into account the nuances which distinguish a word in one language from its dictionary equivalent in another language.

Brot und Wein ('Bread and Wine').

In his work on Rilke Leishman made far more of the shorter lyrical poems than of the *Duino Elegies*, but his translation of the solid, concentrated poems of this, possibly Hölderlin's greatest, work is wholly admirable.

. . . und gewohnt werden die Menschen des Glüks
Und des Tags und zu schaun die Offenbaren, das Antliz
Derer, welche schon längst Eines und Alles genannt,
Tief die verschwiegene Brust mit freier Genüge gefüllet,
Und zuerst und allein alles Verlangen beglükt

Leishman has

. . . and in time men grow accustomed to joy,
Light of day and the sight of gods revealed and the face of
Those who, called hitherto merely the One and the All,

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> Filled the yet silent heart so deep with freest contentment,
> And from the first and alone satisfied ev'ry desire

Here, as Leishman says in his note, Hölderlin is referring to primitive man's conception of a formless nameless 'One and All' as opposed to the highly developed anthropomorphic conception of God. Hamburger translates this passage as

> . . . and men to fortune and day
> Grow accustomed and to see them, visible now, the face
> Of those who already had named One and All long ago,
> With free sufficiency deeply had filled the silent breast
> And at first and alone had contented all desire

which is hardly coherent. Leishman invariably exhibits a firm intellectual grasp of his material and is not afraid to depart somewhat from literalness in order to make the meaning as clear in modern English as it is in the original to one with an average idea of how the German language was used at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Several times Hamburger plainly cannot quite understand the original, gives a literal translation which scarcely makes sense, and hopes for the best.

Leishman's note on the 'Vater! heiter!' crux in the fourth stanza is very reasonable.

But I do not feel that Leishman's attitude to the Christian element in Hölderlin's poetry is altogether justified. On the lines in the eighth stanza

> When, to conclude, there appeared a tranquil Genius, bearing
> Heavenly cheer, who announced Day at an end and withdrew

Leishman has this note: 'This "Genius" has been commonly identified with Christ—why, I do not know. Is it really necessary to assume that he is any more than what he appears to be—one of many genii, spirits, or messengers, who, in rather Rococo fashion, perhaps, and a little operatically, comes to announce the fact that the gods have really departed, and, as it were, draws the curtain?' The figure of Christ certainly fits the picture, and, as more cogent evidence, there is what I should have thought an indisputable fact that Hölderlin did not employ 'genii, spirits, or messengers' in a 'rather Rococo fashion'. Each such figure that appears in Hölderlin's work has much more than a merely decorative purpose—and though Hölderlin habitually interpreted mythological incidents to suit his own intentions, he never invented them, and we may be reasonably sure that something definite is implied by this 'stiller Genius'. On the other hand, by quoting Hölderlin's first fair copy of the final stanza, Leishman shows that one should not be too hasty in assuming that the lines 'Meanwhile, waving his wakening torch, the son of the Highest, He, the Syrian, comes down to these lingering shades' are an allusion to Christ. Certainly it is true that the Christian element is not predominant or even important *in this poem*, and Hamburger's statement that 'Bread and wine reconcile the divine with the earthly, and Christ with Dionysus' is a little dogmatic.

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But, rather like Professor Brückner complaining that Dostoyevsky spoilt *Crime and Punishment* by hanging on to it 'a goody-goody wish-wash about "resurrection through love",' Leishman goes too far in his distaste for this Christianization of Hölderlin. In his introductory essay, after describing the morbid repulsion with which orthodox piety affected Hölderlin and his continual fear of being forced into a curacy (having been trained in Württemberg at the State's expense, he was legally obliged to enter the Church), Leishman goes on to say 'The immediate, the efficient, cause [of his *dementia praecox*] was certainly *la religion*, a fact which makes all the more pathetic his attempts to find a place for it in some of his later and only partially-coherent verse, and all the more exasperating the attempts of many critics to magnify the importance of this verse, and to discover in it something which they seem to prefer to poetry, and which they call *Tiefe*, or Depth'. Since Leishman neither translates nor even mentions by name the famous *Patmos* ode, we may assume that it is this poem to which he is here alluding. It is a great pity that the surrealistically-inclined and the otherwise ill-informed have seized on *Patmos* because of its wrenched syntax and apocalyptic nature; a serious critic like Leishman, intimate with the superb, impeccably sane poetry of Hölderlin's best years may well tend to resent the craze for *Patmos*, and even the very existence of the poem.

But there is nothing of *la religion*, at least the religion of the kept curate in a smug merchant's household, about *Patmos*. Nor is the poem merely a product of madness.

I believe that Christianity did come to have a great, positive, significance for the poet in his last years of sanity. Judging by the element of insecurity and self-consciousness in *Der Einzige*—

> . . . And now
> Full of sadness is my soul,
> As though you heavenly yourselves
> Cried out that if I serve one
> I lack the other.
>
> But I know, it is my
> Fault. For too greatly
> O Christ, I am attached to you,
> Though to Heracles' brother[1]

he at first experienced some difficulty in reconciling Hellas and the Gods with Christ. His failing mind still feared insincerity more than anything else. But in *Patmos* Christ took his place in the world of *Götter*, neither rejected by them nor dwarfing them. The ode is a *tribute* to Christ, not an expression of orthodox Christianity:

> . . . for almost they must guide
> Our fingers and shamefully
> From us a force wrests our hearts.
> For all the heavenly want sacrifice,
> But when one was omitted,
> Good never came of it.[1]

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So much for the content of the poem; as to the style, the free metre, the grammatical irregularities and the violent spasmodic movement of the thought—these are to be found, in a lesser degree, in all of Hölderlin's best poetry. Though the poem may at times be obscure, it is, I should have thought, far too rational for the surrealist's taste; especially that uncompromising conclusion:

> We have served Mother Earth
> And lately have served the sunlight,
> Unknowingly, but the Father
> Who reigns over all loves most that
> The solid letter be cared for and the existing be well
> Construed. German song follows this.[1]

Yes, *Patmos* is the product of a troubled mind; but it has the last strange insight of a mind desperately balancing on the edge of the abyss, not the banal blankness of real madness. It is significant that the verse Hölderlin wrote from time to time during the forty years of his insanity consists of trite reflections in regular conventional forms, the very opposite of *Patmos*.

* * * *

It is to be hoped that Mr. Leishman will on some later occasion give us a translation of *Der Archipelagus*, the long paean for the departed glory of Greece. It is to be regretted, too, that neither Leishman nor Hamburger have included *An der Äther*, an early poem which received rather shabby treatment from Schiller and Goethe—we are conscious of a deep irony when we read Schiller's words of advice to the poetic novice: 'flee, where possible, from philosophical subjects, they are the most ungrateful, and in fruitless struggle with them the best power is often wasted; keep closer to the world of the senses, then you will be less in danger of losing sobriety in your enthusiasm, or of straying into an artificial mode of expression'. It is sensible advice; but we are in a position to note that it was Schiller who should have heeded it, not Hölderlin, whose genius was sincerely and profoundly philosophical. I am ending these notes with a fairly accurate translation of this poem, *An der Äther*, partly to remedy the deficiency, partly because it is characteristic of Hölderlin's earlier work and offers an opportunity for some elucidation of what may seem a thorn in the flesh to readers of Hamburger's and Leishman's books—Hölderlin's several conceptions, Nature, Earth, Ether, Light.

'The Ether' has a wide and not too precise significance; if one bears in mind the importance, the *spiritual* importance, Hölderlin attached to the climate of a country, the quality of its light, the nature of its atmosphere, these conceptions become more or less self-explanatory:

> The natural scenery of home moves me more powerfully the more I study it. The thunderstorm, not only in its highest mani-

[1] *Poems of Hölderlin*, translated by Michael Hamburger.

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festation, but precisely from this other aspect, as a power and as a configuration, and, in the other forms of the sky, light and its influence, giving shape nationally and as a principle and way of fate, so that something is holy to us, its course in coming and going, what is characteristic in forests and the convergence in one region of various kinds of nature, that all the holy places of the earth are grouped together around one place, and the philosophic light around my window, are now my joy . . .[2]

The Gods are manifest as natural powers; thus 'Nature' is the collective term for distinct deities, but Ether is the father of them, Zeus in fact. Hope, however, is 'daughter of the Ether', so do not hope for merely meteorological relationships; Ether is 'du stiller Äther', not the raging swift Helios ('Licht' is a part of Äther, but not synonymous); in *Der Wanderer* it is 'Vater des Vaterlands, mächtige Äther'; but most revealing is this passage from *Der Archipelagus*:

> For the heavenly like to rest
> On a feeling heart, as always, the enrapturing powers,
> Still like to escort the aspiring man, and above
> The mountains of home the ubiquitous ether reposes
> And reigns and loves[1]

and the day of salvation is when 'our Father Ether belongs to each and all' (*Bread and Wine*). The Ether is, in brief, comparable with Wordsworth's Nature, the Greek Zeus, the Christian God the Father. One is easily confused by the number of closely-related phenomenal deities in Hölderlin's work: the elements and the planets affected him so keenly as divine influences in their own right, with even personal attributes, that what is actually an individual form of pantheism seems to be an involved and complex polytheism.

> To The Ether.
>
> As faithfully and kindly as you, O Father Ether,
> Neither god nor man reared me; before even my mother
> Took me into her arms and her breasts nourished me
> Tenderly you lifted me up, poured divine drink for me,
> And first of all urged holy breath through my growing frame.
>
> The living do not thrive merely on earthly victuals,
> You nourish them all with your nectar, O Father!
> And the inspiriting air from your eternal fullness,
> Thrusting its way, flows through all the channels of life.
> And so all creatures love you, and aspire and strive
> Incessantly upwards to you in joyful growth.

---

[2]Letter to Böhlendorf, December, 1802. Hölderlin says truly in this letter, 'as one relates of heroes, I can well say that Apollo has vanquished me', but though in style rather involved and obscure, it is a very interesting document (see Hamburger's introduction).

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Heavenly One! does not the plant seek you with its eyes,
And the lowly shrub stretch its shy arms towards you?
That it may find you, the imprisoned seed shatters the husk;
That, animated by you, it may bathe in your waves,
The forest shakes off the snow like an importunate garment.
The fishes, even, leap and dart longingly
Over the glittering surface of the stream, as if they too
Wished to desert their cradle for you; and the earth-bound pace
Of noble animals turns often to flight, when the mighty longing,
Their secret love for you, seizes them, uplifts them.

The haughty steed despises the ground, like a bent sword
His neck strains skyward, his hoof scarcely disturbs the sand.
As if in jest, the stag stirs the grass-blade with his foot,
Then springs, like a zephyr, across the brook which foams
Rapaciously hither and thither and rambles hardly visible
through the brushwood.

But the Ether's darlings, they, the fortunate birds,
Live and disport themselves joyously in the eternal Hall of the
Father.
There is room for all. None are excluded from these ways,
And great and small move fearlessly in their element.
Above my head they are rejoicing and my heart yearns
Wonderfully for them; like a friendly homeland, the Ether
Beckons from above, and I would I might wander
On the Alpine heights and call to the hurrying eagle,
That, as once it bore the holy youth into the arms of Zeus,
It might carry me out of captivity into the Ether's Hall.

Foolishly we surge this way and that; like the erring vine
When the stake has broken whereon it climbed towards Heaven,
We straggle across the earth, searching, wandering
Through all the world's zones, O Father Ether, in vain—
For the desire ever impels us to walk in your gardens.

We hurl ourselves in the seaflood, to satiate ourselves
In those boundless plains, while the endless wave plays
Round our keel and the heart rejoices at the Sea God's might.
Yet are we never satisfied, for that deeper ocean calls us,
Where the lighter billow stirs—O who is able
To steer the drifting ship towards those golden shores!

But while I gaze longingly into the darkening distance,
Where you embrace the strange coast with a bluish wave,
You come murmuring down from the fruit tree's blossoming
branches,
You yourself, O Father Ether! soothe my struggling heart
And now, as before, I am glad to be living with the flowers of
earth.

D. J. ENRIGHT.

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COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

CATHOLICITY OR NARROWNESS?

A CRITICAL HISTORY OF ENGLISH POETRY, by Herbert J. C. Grierson and J. C. Smith (Chatto and Windus, 21/-).

Any history of English poetry deserving the name must be a work of criticism (a point I made in an exchange with Mr. F. W. Bateson in these pages some years ago). But if so, what history can we point to? The appearance of the adjective in the title of the book under review suggests a recognition, on the part of the authors, of the depressing force of this question. The 'critical' along with Sir Herbert Grierson's name (of his collaborator one knows less—his having been, as the dust-jacket tells us, a founder of the English Association establishes nothing conclusively against him) makes it not altogether naïve to have expected something different from the ordinary literary history.

I wish to stress Sir Herbert Grierson's distinction. He is an academic eminence in the field of literary studies, and he is regarded with genuine respect by people genuinely interested in literature. It is a rare distinction, and it points the moral of my review—for a moral is what I am primarily concerned with. In what follows I shall be understood to intend no disrespect towards the authors; my attention is upon the state of affairs their book represents.

The distinction referred to makes it representative in a very forcible way, for in spite of the reasons intimated for hoping, it doesn't differ notably from the other literary histories. I hadn't supposed that the 'perspective of English poetry' (see the back outside dust-jacket) given by the authors would coincide with mine, but I had expected to find some stimulus to testing, verifying and readjusting this. Actually they offer no perspective at all—nothing that I should call a perspective—'Most of the newcomers were true poets' (p. 495). It is the Georgian or Marsh poets who are in question, and the judgment represents fairly the kind of catholicity that marks the book.

Discrimination is life, indiscrimination is death: I offer this as obviously a very suitable maxim for a university school of English, and it seems to me very plain that a critical habit tending to carry severity even towards 'narrowness' constitutes, for the student, a more healthy climate than Sir Herbert Grierson's and Dr. Smith's kind of catholicity—which is the kind fostered almost universally in the academic world. I put 'narrowness' in inverted commas

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because I know it is the word that Sir Herbert and his collaborator have ready for me. They, of course, can discriminate too: 'Mr. Masefield has not Chaucer's witty touch nor his universality' (p. 504). As one who thinks that Chaucer comes next to Shakespeare, I can only say that I find such a sentence fantastic, and damning to the kind of catholicity that made it possible. If you are capable of saying such things you are not (I put it as inoffensively as I can) capable of conveying a due sense of the greatness of Chaucer.

My tactical reason for picking on that particular example will have been plain. I might follow it up with dozens of what seem to me equally fantastic pronouncements in the field of modern verse. But if, for instance, I quote (p. 510):

> 'But Mr. Eliot can scarcely be counted the pioneer of English modernism. The honour may fairly be claimed by Miss Sitwell'.

I may be supposed by the authors of the book to be claiming the honour for Mr. Eliot. And I don't in any case want to make it a matter of difference of judgment about particular modern poets. The quite incontestable point (as I see it) is that if you treat as worthy of respectful attention such swarms of modern poets you are not exhibiting or promoting a living interest of any kind in modern poetry.

However, it is not on the treatment of modern poetry that I want to lay the stress—though it seems to me patent that something is wrong with any professional devotion to poetry that doesn't carry with it some ability to deal with the present. It was to the chapters on the seventeenth century that I turned above all, expecting, at the least, help and provocation towards a better charting of the currents of tradition between Donne and Pope. There are, of course, interesting observations in those chapters, but as for that drawing of the lines of relation, transmission and development which a 'critical history' surely implies, so little is done in that respect that few readers who have already taken an interest in the century will find much enlightenment—will, in fact, be prompted to make many notes except of what has been left out. And yet Sir Herbert's *Cross-currents in the Literature of the Seventeenth Century* is a book one goes through with gratitude every year.

One might exhibit this deficiency of critical interest in poetry as it exposes itself in particular judgments and valuations. There is, for instance, the treatment of Jonson, now *the* great neglected poet. I suppose that without an appreciation of his intrinsic qualities you can't appreciate his importance in the poetic history of the century. At any rate, the book conveys no notion of that importance—without appreciating it, how can you write a critical history of seventeenth-century poetry?—and does nothing to correct the current undervaluation of the poet. (I'm thinking of his non-dramatic work, but my eye catches this: '*Sejanus* is carefully constructed and scrupulously documented, but it is dead, though not so dead as *Catiline* with its long speeches and choruses') (p. 130). At the other

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end of the century there is no recognition of Pope's peculiar greatness, or of the way in which all streams flow down to him.

But I want to go further back and to stress, not particular judgments, but a radical deficiency that lies behind them. It stares at us here:

> 'But to enjoy Pope's Satires you must to some extent be able to share Saintsbury's conviction that in poetry the form is everything'.

Sir Herbert Grierson and Dr. Smith will feel that I am dogmatic and impertinent when I say that the discussion of poetry at the level of Saintsbury's conviction can yield no critical profit—no increase of understanding—to anybody, and that to suppose that 'in poetry the form is everything' means anything is to show that one doesn't know how thinking and talking to any critical effect about poetry begin. So we can be told that 'Milton's ear may have been no finer than Shakespeare's by nature, but it was much more highly cultivated' (p. 105), and that

> To save the Athenian walls from ruin bare

is 'perhaps the most beautiful line in the language' (p. 166). And, in a discussion of the nature of the mature Shakespearean complexity we are given, as the most striking characteristic of the 'Pity like a naked new-born babe' speech (no other comment is offered): 'Image hurtles after image so hurriedly as to leave the impression of confusion and mixed metaphor' (p. 127). Again (I pick my examples more or less at random) we read (p. 497) of 'Owen's influence on the technique of post-war verse' ('No one except Miss Sitwell has invented any new rhythms') (p. 520).

I repeat, I am very far from intending any disrespect towards the authors of this book. My criticism is directed against the state of affairs it represents—a ridiculous and calamitous state of affairs which it is the duty, at the present crisis, of all who are concerned about humane education to get recognized, as widely as possible, for what it is. 'English' has now become the central 'Humanity'; hundreds of picked young men and women embark every year on the formal study of literature who will complete their years at the university without having been introduced to the elements of critical thinking (that is, to the means of reading intensively and intelligently) and without knowing that a relevant discipline can exist.

Their guides and instructors do not know. Here, in the work of a most distinguished literary scholar joined with a founder of the English Asociation we have all the fallacies and the substitutes for thought from which the student should be emancipated in his first term. There is that 'ear', for instance: if he cannot be made to see, in his first term, the obstructive and thought-inhibiting absurdity of the fallacy (so inveterate it would seem, because of the classical training of so many 'English' dons) he should be advised to abandon literary studies. If he is capable of profiting by a prolonged literary training he will have no difficulty in understanding that the 'ear'

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engaged in reading poetry is never concerned with pure sound. He can quickly be brought to realize that the way the sound is taken—its effects of rhythm, body, timbre, 'music', and so on—is inseparably and essentially conditioned by the meaning: the sound cannot be separated from the total action of the words. That being so, he will see readily enough that to attribute a specially 'fine ear' to the kind of poet who is less concerned with complex subtleties and precisions of meaning than other poets is a dubious proceeding. It leads to a preoccupation with—or an ability to take seriously—the analysis of vowels, consonants and prosodic effects. And such a preoccupation, or such an ability, is lamentable because it disqualifies for the kind of analysis that shows the 'Pity like a naked new-born babe' speech to be, not a vivid and moving succession of hurtling images, but a marvellously complex, economical and precise presentation of the tragic theme, and of the dramatically relevant 'psychology' of Macbeth. No one capable of this kind of analysis, the student will realize, could think that Milton acquired by cultivation a finer ear than Shakespeare.

These are elementary points, but it would clearly be, more often than not, rash for a candidate in 'English' to count on the recognition of their force by his examiners. It is no discipline of intelligence, or discipline of any kind, that the 'authoritative' works he is incited to consult, and form himself by, exhibit for his inspiration; they hold up for him, as the aim and end of a university 'English' course, a vast and deadening acquisition of names, titles, dates, externalities of information, and sedative permissibilities of quasi-critical comment. English Literature for the established system, the 'Arts' (what front do they deserve to maintain against the Sciences?), is an institution, an establishment, towards which a habit of deference must be inculcated. For anyone who is concerned for the perpetuation of a living tradition the desirable attitude is very different. 'Meredith', the authors of the *Critical History* tell us, 'was a remarkable metrist. He had even less care than Browning for verbal melody, but he had a strong sense of rhythm, and . . . of quantity'. 'Meredith had the ear of an organ-grinder and the vision of a chorus-fancier': this—Mr. Middleton Murry, as I remember, wrote it in the *Athenaeum* a quarter of a century ago—is a kind of thing that, in the view of constituted authority, destroys the sense of Good Form and is calculated to have a deplorable effect on the student. My own view is that, whether just or unjust, it represents an attitude incomparably more favourable to education, development and real respect for the Masters than that represented by the book under review.

F. R. LEAVIS.

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HOPKINS COMMEMORATED

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS, 1844-1889. A Centenary Commemoration, being the first of two volumes by W. H. Gardner (Secker and Warburg, 25/-).

Ironically, Gerard Manley Hopkins may now safely be called an established poet, while Bridges, who only thirty years ago was sponsoring him from the basis of an apparently assured prestige, is increasingly 'placed'. And yet, after these hundred years, Hopkins is still sufficiently a live topic of literary controversy, and holds a place in nineteenth-century poetry so peculiarly his own, as amply to justify Dr. Gardner's painstaking and thorough attention. Superficially, Hopkins still tends to present a curious knot of anomalies, and the general critical tendency, particularly of recent years, has been to dissect the poet in order to discover some obscure disease of which the inner conflict expressed here and there in his work is felt to be symptomatic. This clinical approach, presupposing as it does some unhealthy constriction in the poet's nature, regarding a fundamentally religious conflict as abnormal instead of commonplace in itself, is inadequate for a complete evaluation of Hopkins. He demands from the reader a willingness to approach his own set of values with a certain delicacy and respect, if not for themselves, at least for the scrupulous honesty and sensitivity with which he holds them. The type of mind which can grant him this sympathy is becoming increasingly rare, as religious experience comes to be taken less and less for granted. He is unfortunate in so far as present-day readers are concerned.Those who are best qualified to appraise his matter find his manner a hindrance, while the most enthusiastic admirers of his manner are all too often baffled or alienated by much of his matter. Dr. Gardner's chapter of potted criticism shows with how many and how varied reservations Hopkins has been accepted, and the tentative way in which he is approached by those who find elements which please and elements which alienate inseparably knitted together in his verse. Even Miss Phare, who is given more space than she deserves, has an uneasy feeling that she may be indulging in 'peevish fault-finding', and Mr. G. M. Young's attack on Hopkins's metrical theories—'the root of his error lay in an ignorance of the subject so profound that it was not aware that there was anything to know'—is almost the only comment which carries behind it an uncompromising Victorian conviction of what poetry should be like. But the problems which Hopkins appears to present are less attributable to the poet himself than to the intellectual climate in which he is read. An ear attuned to Tennyson's verse can only find Hopkins jarring, no matter how sympathetically it can receive his sentiments, while the 'scientific' mind, responsive as it may be to Hopkins's technique, is no less likely to feel hostile or condescending towards the religious tensions of the poems. It seems suitable,

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after a century, to consider why a defence as scholarly as Dr. Gardner's should not seem out of place, and why Hopkins still appears to present obstacles to readers who can enjoy both Herbert and Eliot.

The commonest and easiest obstacle is the persistent feeling that being at once a poet and a priest involves some essential contradiction. It is this feeling, perhaps, which gives Dr. Gardner his title for his first chapter—'The Two Vocations'—and he is at pains to show that no contradiction exists. The aestheticism of the late nineteenth century is indeed incompatible with Hopkins's religious belief; but Hopkins's mature work bears no relationship to that aestheticism. His obvious delight in sensuous beauty is informed with a deep ethical interest quite beyond the followers of Pater; his interest in 'form' is different in kind from theirs. And so when Dr. Gardner says that 'few English poets have been actuated so powerfully and consistently by the principle enunciated in Pater's "All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music" ' one is compelled to note that this principle means little or nothing if applied to the poetry of Hopkins, and that the most obvious quality of his verse is his success in finding or creating the right word and the right inflection, and not the 'beautiful' word or cadence in the sense which Pater intends. Hopkins's religious preoccupations give a wider context to the minute and delicate perceptions of his senses; his asceticism places them in relationship to a depth and complexity of human experience outside the limited scope of art for art's sake 'proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass and simply for those moments' sake'. Hopkins has a standard beyond gratification of the senses by which the 'highest quality' can be judged. One may well believe that Walter Pater had not. Dr. Gardner rightly points out that Pater's attitude was 'opposed to the mature Hopkins's more profound reconciliation of aesthetics and ethics'. That Hopkins is at once a poet and a priest, withdrawn into himself and at the same time acutely aware of the world outside him should thus not present any serious difficulty; a similar complexity of personality is a characteristic of the seventeenth-century poets. It is a complexity which, by comparison, makes the poetry of Tennyson and Swinburne appear naïve Hopkins's religious background should present no more difficulty than that of Chaucer, and certainly less than that of Blake, being more closely connected with a main European tradition in letters. Finally, it is necessary only to recall the constriction of his talent which Gray felt so acutely to realize that a sense of being 'Time's eunuch' is not a perquisite of a particularly exacting religious conscience or persuasion.

More worthy of serious consideration, as an obstruction to a satisfactory reading of Hopkins, is the tendency to regard him too simply as a modern poet—a poet to stand with Yeats, Eliot and Pound. This Hopkins certainly is not in many ways, and the reader who approaches him with the feeling that he ought to be is bound to feel some confusion. His sensibility is 'modern', of course, compared with Tennyson's, or Arnold's. He is, of course, a 'live'

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poet and influence in the same way as are Donne or Wordsworth, but it would be misleading to suggest that his affinity with poets writing since the last war was greater than that of either of the earlier poets. In some respects he remains Victorian; in others he may probably be more adequately related to the poets of two or three centuries before him than to those of a century later. The sense of a more than personal frustration and debility, of a disease spreading through the whole structure of society and extending even to the supernatural order, have no place in the poetry of Hopkins. The feeling of universal disorder and disruption, of present inadequacy and ultimate uncertainty expressed by Yeats and Eliot, and now become so much part of our intellectual background:

> Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world . . .

belong to an age and temperament as foreign to Hopkins as to Dryden. His feeling for the sourness of industrial civilization, though given a richer particularity, has more in common with the 'strange disease of modern life' of Arnold than with the Waste Land of Eliot. He is nearer to the spirit of the religious poems of Donne or Herbert than to *Ash Wednesday*. His poetry carries different suggestions, postulates a different state of mind and society, from that of his successors. For the contemporary tendency is to suggest ultimately a social predicament, while Hopkins suggests a personal one. Thus, comparing a Hopkins sonnet with a part of *Ash Wednesday* on a not dissimilar theme, it will be noticed that the suggestiveness of Eliot is an outward move, which stretches from the intimate personal experience to embrace the predicament of a whole social group, while Hopkins centres inwards to a more complete and concise definition of his own personal experience. The rapid shift from the personal 'I' to the social 'us' is typical of Eliot:

> And I pray that I may forget
> These matters that with myself I too much discuss
> Too much explain
> Because I do not hope to turn again
> Let these words answer
> For what is done, not to be done again
> May the judgment not be too heavy upon us . . .'

Hopkins's sonnet involves himself only:

> My own heart let me have more pity on; let
> Me live to my sad self hereafter kind,
> Charitable. Not live this tormented mind
> With this tormented mind tormenting yet . . .

and concentrates more and more particularly on self as it proceeds:

> Soul, self; come poor Jackself, I do advise
> You, jaded, let be; call off thoughts awhile
> Elsewhere; leave comfort root-room . . .

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He is concerned, in fact, not with the social aspect of a given situation, but fundamentally with an approach to

> The selfless self of self, most strange, most still,
> Fast furled and all foredrawn to No or Yes.

His 'criticism of life' is thus of a different order from that which is now peculiarly our own. It is made by firmer and more rigid standards. The criticism of Eliot and of Yeats is directed outwards, against an environment and a cultural situation and the standards by which it is made are the result of a deliberate and fastidious choice on the part of the poet, the products of a critical, not a religious, discipline. Hopkins arrives naturally at a certainty about fundamentals which Eliot attempts to reach with so much scrupulous consideration. But beyond that certainty there are still tormenting doubts and problems which are Hopkins's domain. The question is of the adequacy of self, not of the adequacy of society. His unquestioning acceptance of a code of conduct, an unequivocal attitude towards the moral values endorsed by the Church, combined with a scholastic intricacy and precision in defining them, make him appear naïve where the poets of the 'thirties are sophisticated, sophisticated where they are naïve. It is not necessary to drag in the now completely unacceptable Hopkins of

> Immortal beauty is death with duty

—unacceptable because the words used no longer carry a simple suggestion, have acquired, in this arrangement, a taint from use for cheap ends—in a demonstration of this sophistication, and absence of it. Compare, for example, the sonnet

> Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend
> With thee; but sir, so what I please is just . . .

with Auden's

> Sir, no man's enemy, forgiving all . . .

and the poise of the one dwarfs the other to the dimensions of a schoolboy's prize-piece. On the other hand, Hopkins's attitude towards honour and patriotism, at its extreme in the line

> Where is the field I must play the man on? . . .

has a schoolboyish flavour as compared with the urbane manner of Gerontion

> Think
> Neither fear nor courage saves us. Unnatural vices
> Are fathered by our heroism. Virtues
> Are forced upon us by our impudent crimes . . .

It is convenient to note too how the whole movement and vocabulary of the Eliot passage is that of polite speech, with the inflections of a mannered and cultivated voice, like nothing in Hopkins. Hopkins

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has the quality common to dialect speech of all types of expressing immediately and forcibly what is felt, regarding the object before the audience. As Charles Williams says,

> 'It is as if the imagination, seeking for expression, had found both verb and substantive at one rush, had almost begun to say them at once, and had separated them only because the intellect had reduced the original unity, into divided but related sounds'.

The same is not true of Eliot, who, unlike Hopkins, is acutely aware of the literary associations of the words he uses, and of the types of social milieux in which one might hear them spoken. Hopkins is thus very different as a 'modern poet' from the poets of the post-war period, and allowances must be made for this difference if he is to be understood. The many unsuccessful imitations of Hopkins which Dr. Gardner adduces prove how little his derivatives find themselves in harmony with what is essential in his poetry, no matter how fascinated they may be with his technique. Hopkins, in fact, was not an innovator in the sense that Eliot is; he was not equipped to found any important school. His importance lies in having returned, in an age of which the poetic temper was Spenserian, smooth and, in a bad sense, simple, to the Shakespearean tradition in English—to the vigorous, the energetic and the concrete expression, in preference to the languid and the general. No reading which attempts to relate Hopkins to a school or clique, rather than to a tradition, can be satisfactory. He must, to a large extent, be read with a certain historical perspective; the time has come, or should have come, at which his verse can be seen as an achieved whole, and criticism of him fitted into a general critical theory of English poetry—a theory, of course, modified by his verse as by that of any original poet, but not still in the process of modification by it (as by that of a strictly contemporary poet), and hence capable of a disinterested and balanced assessment of his poetic value. It must be admitted, of course, in theory, that a new verse might arise which would place him in a new perspective, underline in him quite different qualities from those which now seem his most just claim to be read. If that were so, however, it would involve also a radical reassessment of the tradition to which he belongs; the importance and particular virtues of that tradition have been sufficiently defined and stressed, here and elsewhere, to make it unprofitable to dwell on them further. Or so one would have thought.

Yet one is a little surprised to find Dr. Gardner, after very justly relating Hopkins to Shakespeare, the Metaphysicals, and Keats, quoting a passage from *The Wreck of the Deutschland* with the following comment:

> 'It is this dramatic, motile imagery which is so characteristic of Hopkins, and which assimilates him, as we have already remarked, to no other poet so much as to Shelley—the dynamic, Heraclitean Shelley of *The West Wind, The Cloud,* and "Worlds on Worlds are rolling ever".'

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There is unfortunately no space here for a detailed comparison of the use of language in and the sensibility behind *The Wreck of the Deutschland* and *The Ode to the West Wind;* but one cannot help but comment on the superficiality of any similarity which exists. *The West Wind,* in its way a successful poem, carries one on breathlessly through a succession of loosely related images; it is an able piece of programme music, puts in plangent English a series of connected general impressions. But the English is not the urgent, vigorous language of Hopkins at his best, nor are the images more than pleasant and appropriate pictures compared with the reinforced, searching metaphor of *The Wreck of the Deutschland.* Shelley's poem has a unity of mood, but he does not here or in any other poem achieve the unity of conception which informs the best of Hopkins, extends and increases the meaning of every metaphor, and moulds the language to the form of the experience to be conveyed. Shelley's affinities are rather with Tennyson than with Hopkins.

Dr. Gardner, however, is not often as challenging as this. It is doubtful if anyone will find anything startlingly new in his study of Hopkins, though as the blurb says, this is probably the first time that a complete and balanced review of his achievement has been attempted. If Hopkins had faults (and I think he had), it is perhaps, to be expected that they should be disregarded in a volume celebrating his centenary. Dr. Garner's able and sensitive appraisal of Hopkins's virtues more than recompenses one for the absence of the slightest note of unfavourable criticism in this volume. The particular criticism of individual poems is a valuable contribution to the understanding of Hopkins, and those whose interests run to the technicalities of metrical innovation and virtuosity will find them considered in an admirably thorough manner. The second volume, not yet published is to contain further appreciations of individual poems, and a summing up of Hopkins's status as a poet. From the sympathy with which Dr. Gardner approaches his subject in this volume, and from the wealth of evidence with which he supports his case, one cannot doubt that Hopkins will emerge from the complete and careful study with claims to consideration as strong as those of any poet writing in the last hundred years, and stronger than those of most. Whether Dr. Gardner will succeed in getting those claims more generally recognized than at present, and Hopkins removed from the laboratory into the library, remains to be seen.

R. G. LIENHARDT.

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TRISTAN AND ISOLT

TRISTAN UND ÎSOLT: A POEM BY GOTTFRIED VON STRASSBURG, edited with introduction, notes, glossary and a facsimile, by August Closs (German Medieval Series, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 8/6).

The poverty of German literature in the three centuries preceding the age of Goethe and Schiller—apart from the great event of Luther's Bible—has perhaps given rise to an idea that literary culture in Germany began with these poets. It is true that Germany was singularly lacking in anything approaching our 'Elizabethan Age', but it is equally true that she excelled any other single European country in the cultural achievement of the Middle Ages: of the four greatest poetic works belonging to the era, two are German—the *Parzival* of Wolfram von Eschenbach and *Tristan und Îsolt* by Gottfried von Strassburg—and the incontestably greatest lyric poet of the times is also a German, Walther von der Vogelweide. A number of only less remarkable writers, such as Hartman von Ouwe, Wernher der Gartenaere, Konrad von Würzberg and Hugo von Trimberg, help to show how the Court Epic and the *Minnesang* were to the medieval German poets what the drama was to English poets of the sixteenth century: the form and the spirit meeting to produce not one or two solitary works but a whole school of genius.

Messrs. Blackwell are to be thanked warmly for their German Medieval Series, in which they have already published *Der Arme Heinrich* (Hartman von Ouwe), *Meier Helmbrecht* (Wernher der Gartenaere), a volume of *Essays on the Medieval German Love Lyrics* with a facsimile and translations by M. F. Richey, and now Gottfried's *Tristan und Îsolt*, with a selection from Walther von der Vogelweide in preparation.

Mr. Closs's introduction and notes to the (abridged) *Tristan und Îsolt* are very helpful, his remarks on Gottfried's sources and the various literary versions of the Tristan saga are unusually lucid and interesting, and the glossary is invaluable (I wish it could have been more comprehensive). Gottfried's work is, or should be, of general interest: the reader with a fair working knowledge of modern German will not find the language difficulty insuperable since the vowel-shifting is easily allowed for (Middle High German *î* developed into the modern German *ei*, *û* into *au*, etc.), grammatical differences are often elucidated by the context, the vocabulary of the *höfische Epik* is limited and conventional and the forms and customs of medieval chivalry are a matter of general knowledge. In addition there are Mr. Closs's glossary and a number of translations into modern German, not easily obtainable at the present moment.

* * * *

There is no call to approach *Tristan und Îsolt* (written about the year 1210) in a spirit of antiquarian curiosity, since it is pro-

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nouncedly a lively, penetrative and interesting work. As an exposition of what is now called the psychology of love, the development of emotion, its repercussions on character, and in particular its fundamental equivocalness, Gottfried's poem makes Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* seem a pedestrian, laboured affair.

Heinrich Kurz, in an interesting section of his *Leitfaden zur Geschichte der deutschen Litteratur,* contrasts the *Tristansage* with the *Bretonischer Sagenkreis,* the Arthurian cycle; of the latter he says 'the real man with his passions never emerges, they are suppressed by the courtly conventions and at best show themselves in courtly costume', whereas the Tristan saga 'distinguishes itself from the rest of the Breton saga in that love appears not as the set courtly relationship, but as genuine passion'. Genuine passion is without question the theme of the story as it appeared to Gottfried, of whom Kurz later gives an effective thumbnail sketch: 'A master in the depiction of outward appearances as of spiritual conditions, yet he does not allow them to accumulate, neither does he degenerate into an inartistic expansiveness'. For although, as Mr. Closs writes in his introduction, 'no medieval German poet has ever gone further than Gottfried in making a religion of love', he did not permit his religion to lose itself in a wordy mysticism (an accusation, incidentally, which Gottfried brought against Wolfram), and indeed his delight in word-play, antithesis, repetition, alliteration and similar devices, together with a taste for quasi-logical procedure, reminds us just a little of the English metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century:

ein senedaere, ein senedaerîn,
ein man, ein wîp; ein wîp, ein man,
Tristan, Îsôt; Îsôt, Tristan.

Nonetheless, and in spite of the fact that, as has often been remarked, 'the spirit of *courtoisie* and the spirit of the Tristan story are incompatible', Gottfried does not really depart from the traditional forms of the Court Epic: Tristan is a true son of his age, for he can sing and speak in 'britûnisch . . . und gâlois, guot latîne und franzois', he excels at the hunt and at the harp, and he is a finished warrior. King Mark's courtiers applaud the brilliant fourteen-year-old youth with

'â Tristan, waere ich alse duo!
Tristan, dû maht gerne leben:
Tristan, dir ist der wunsch gegeben
aller der fuoge, die kein man
ze dirre werlde gehaben kan'.[1]

But *Minne* is more than the highest form of exercise in *courtoisie;* it is not simply the idyll in the 'Grotto of Love', for if it is

[1]'Oh Tristan, would I were like you. Tristan, you must love life. Tristan, to you the wish is granted to possess all the attributes that no other living man can have'.

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a kind of religion, it is a religion with its hell as well as its heaven. Historians have commented on the change which occurred when the Provençal lyric was transferred to Germany: generalizing, one might say that the German sang *sub specie aeternitatis*, a serenade to *morâliteit* and the world, rather than solely for his lady's ear, and perhaps as a consequence of this his song was not entirely joyful. Walther's words indicate the wider range of the Minnesinger's purpose:

> Swer guotes wîbes minne hât,
> der schamt sich aller missetât[2]

and in the *Nibelungenlied* itself, Kriemhild expresses the tragic knowledge of how

> wie liebe mit leide ze jungest lônen kan[3]

Both these characteristics—the moral aspect of *Minne* and the sense of foreboding due to its double character—are strongly present in Gottfried's work. As Mr. Closs remarks, he was obviously interested in education, for his account of Isolt's training is very revealing:

> Under aller dirre lêre
> gap er ir eine unmüezekeit,
> die heizen wir morâliteit.
> diu kunst diu lêret schoene site:
> dâ solten alle frouwen mite
> in ir jugent unmüezic wesen.
> morâliteit daz süeze lesen
> deist saelec unde reine.
> ir lêre hât gemeine
> mit der werlde und mit gote.
> si lêret uns in ir gebote
> got unde der werlde gevallen.[4]

After six months intensive education in *morâliteit*, Îsolt emerges

> wol gesite,
> schôn' unde reine gemuot,
> ir gebaerde süeze unde guot[5]

But *Minne* itself is the most cogent teacher:

---

[2]'Who possesses a good woman's love is ashamed at every ill deed'

[3]'How love with sorrow is rewarded in the end'.

[4]'And all this instruction set her a task which we call morality: the art which teaches fine manners, and with which all ladies should busy themselves in their youth. Morality, the sweet study that is blessed and faultless; its lesson is common to the world and to God; its instruction teaches us how to please both God and the world'.

[5]'well-mannered, of a lovely and pure disposition, her bearing sweet and excellent'.

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lieb' ist ein alsô saelic dinc,
ein alsô saeleclîch gerinc,
daz niemen âne ir lêre
noch tugende hât noch êre[6]

And Gottfried considers, though in no oppressive manner, that he has a special mission to perform in the telling of the tale:

al eine und sîn si lange tôt,
ir süezer name der lebet iedoch,
und sol ir tôt der werlde noch
ze guote lange und iemer leben,
den triuwe gernden triuwe geben,
den êre gernden êre[7]

Turning to the second characteristic, the profound ambiguity of love, Tristan's very name is a token that the God of Love cannot ensure a happy life for his disciples:

von triste Tristan was sîn nam.
der name was ime gevallesam
unde alle wîs gebaere;
daz kiesen an dem maere[8]

Nor is it a matter for surprise or resentment that joy and sorrow should be so inextricably mingled in the lover's experience,

swem nie von liebe leit geschach,
dem geschach ouch liep von liebe nie.
liep unde leit diu wâren ie
an minnen ungescheiden.
man muoz mit disen beiden
êr' unde lop erwerben
oder âne sî verderben.[9]

Tristan is no mere tinsel knight, no Tennysonian Galahad; he is something of a fatalist, as when, before his fight with the Irish king, Môrolt, he says to Mark

gehabet iuch wol!
ez ergât doch niuwan, alse ez sol,[10]

---

[6]'love is so blessed a thing, so blissful a struggle, that no-one can attain either true virtue or honour without its instruction'.

[7]'Although they are long dead yet their sweet name still lives, and their death shall ever live to the good of the world, imparting loyalty to those who desire loyalty, honour to those desiring honour'.

[8]'From *triste* Tristan was his name. This name was appropriate to him and fitting in every way; we realize this from the story'.

[9]'Who has never felt the pain of love has never felt the happiness of love. Joy and sorrow were ever united in love. With both of these man must earn honour and praise, or without them perish'.

[10]'Be of good cheer! It happens to no-one otherwise than is intended'.

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which is not altogether a pious expression of faith in God's judgment, for later in the poem, when Îsolt swears her fidelity to Mark on an oath couched in ambiguous terms and then endures successfully the ordeal by fire, Gottfried interjects with

> dâ wart wol goffenbaeret
> und al der werlt bewaeret,
> daz der vil tugenthafte Krist
> wintschaffen alse ein ermel ist.[11]

But in spite of a little difference of opinion with 'die pfaffen', Gottfried does not evince any serious disagreement with orthodox religion. Kurz remarks, in fact, '(Gottfried) avoids everything that could displease a noble mind', which is really a surprising achievement considering that the theme of his work is Tristan's love for Îsolt, whose brother he killed in single combat and who has since married Tristan's good-hearted uncle, King Mark of Cornwall. I think the reason for the essential cleanness of tone, purity even, of the poem lies partly in the device of the 'tranc von minnen', the Love Potion which the Irish queen intends for Mark and Îsolt but is shared by Tristan, Mark's ambassador, and Îsolt in the belief that it is wine. In this way the theme is transformed from a discreditable, deliberate adulterous relationship into a fated, inescapable passion,

> der einez sprach: 'seht, hie stât wîn
> in disem väzzelîne'.
> nein, ezn was niht mit wîne,
> doch ez im glîch waere,
> ez was diu wernde swaere,
> diu endelôse herzenôt,
> von der si beide lâgen tôt.[12]

In this version of the eternal triangle, moral judgments have no validity, nor do they obtrude: one is content to watch Gottfried etch out the awakening of passion, its growth, its influence, and to sympathise with the lovers' difficulties and intrigues and the constant danger of discovery which sets an edge on their ardour, without being troubled by the question of how Gottfried could reconcile the unlawfulness of their love with his high idealization of *Minne* and his exalted estimate of Tristan's character. Tristan cannot be blamed on moral grounds for the simple reason that he did not permit his love to develop of his own free will: it came as a kind of madness from the gods, against which the lovers had no defence. Compare this with the otherwise parallel Lancelot-Guinevere story and you

[11] 'Thus it was revealed and proven before the whole world, that the knightly Christ is as fickle as a sleeve' (sic).

[12] 'One said: "See, here is wine in this small vessel". No, though it looked like wine, it was not. It was the troubled perplexity, the endless distress of heart, of which they will both lie dead'.

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will see what an important part the Love Potion plays in the general atmosphere of the legend: Lancelot's love for Guinevere is an anomaly, it is out of character—Tristan's love for Isolt is inevitable, it is *beyond* character. No doubt it is due to the implications of the *minnetranc* that Mark is very nearly the only cuckold in literature that we can respect, while Arthur is in this respect such a pitiful spectacle.

Mr. Closs, however, would not agree with this theory. He regards the Love Potion as a trivial incident which Gottfried happened to include because it occurred in his source: 'With Gottfried the love-potion is no longer reason and excuse, it is a poetic symbol, and Gottfried perhaps kept the love-drink because it made an excellent climax'. But Mr. Closs very truly describes Gottfried's conception of *Minne* as 'almost a substitute for religion', and I suggest that without this traditional device Gottfried might perhaps not have felt sufficiently free to develop this near-religious conception. Normal moral attitudes (which no doubt existed alongside the *Rules of Love*) would have intervened to such an extent—taking into account Tristan's debt to his uncle, 'Marke der guote, der hövesche hohgemuote'—that without the compensating 'moral support' of the Love Potion, Gottfried might well have found the Tristan legend useless, even inimical to his purpose. Mr. Closs's point is that the Love Potion either is intended to give a crude, mechanical origin to *Minne*, or else it is there as an unnecessary and rather trivial symbol; we are on dangerous ground when we talk about the attitudes and reactions of the medieval mind, but it certainly seems to me that the Love Potion is the means whereby the love-theme is freed from all taint of unpleasantness, from anything which, as Herz says, 'einen veredelten Geschmack verletzen kann'. The Irish legend of Diarmuid and Grainne has a similar motivation: Diarmuid's love-spot is accidentally perceived by Grainne, his uncle's bride, when he raises his visor in the heat of battle.

In tone, Gottfried's poem is the antithesis of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. It is a tragedy, not a sustained outburst of romantic eroticism. I suppose that Wagner's music might be described as the Apotheosis of Forbidden Love, with the emphasis on the adjective: while in Gottfried's depiction of the psychology of forbidden love, with all its particular joys and sorrows, the compulsion of the Love Potion precludes undue stress on its forbidden nature. It is really rather ironic that Wagner should have made use of the Tristan legend, for in its original form it is singularly free from the fervid quiverings of poeticised animality and the pleasures of refined sinfulness which Thomas Mann hits off so tellingly in his short story *Tristan*. Mr. Closs's remark that 'Mozart . . . in some ways recalls Gottfried perhaps more poignantly than any other artist' is one of the most illuminating in his introduction.

* * * *

I take my epilogue from Emil Ludwig's *How to Treat the Germans*: 'Women have played a less important part in the inner

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growth of German civilization than they have in other countries. No great love poem exists to inflame the heart of the whole nation like Tristan and Isolde, the letters of Heloise and Abelard, or the love poems of the Brownings. There are no counterparts to Louis XV and Madame Pompadour, Dante and Beatrice, Paolo and Francesca. The conflict of the great German legend *The Nibelungen* centres round a contest of honour and precedence. Brunhild and Kriemhild, the two heroines, quarrel at the church entrance over which one should enter first'.

It's almost as amusing as *1066 and All That;* until you notice that the book ' is based on speeches I have made recently, one of which being a Testimony before the Foreign Relations Committee of the House of Representatives, others being lectures in a Government Institution'.

D. J. ENRIGHT.

MEET MR. FORSTER

E. M. FORSTER, by Lionel Trilling (Hogarth Press, 8/6).

This book doesn't, as one might have hoped it would, exhibit the presumable advantages to be enjoyed by a critic who sees England, and the particular milieu to which Mr. Forster as a writer belongs, well from the outside. Its interest for the English reader is quite other: it lies in the light it seems to throw on the American academic world, to which, I believe, Mr. Trilling belongs. Can it be that for certain elements there the Cambridge of *The Longest Journey* represents something like an ideal—an ideal of the kind of centre of sweetness and light (*hinc lucem et pocula sacra*) a university should be? At any rate, Mr. Trilling appears to be as uncritical as Mr. Forster himself, in that novel, of the Cambridge that emancipated and formed him—the Cambridge he presents there as emancipating and formative (whereas those of us who, closer at hand, see what the King's Hellenism and liberalism of those days have come to find it hard, perhaps, to be fair to them).

> 'And if Forster's public school presented him with his dominant theme, his university taught him to deal with it'.

But surely, what a critic who takes Forster seriously must be very largely concerned with nowadays is how that university didn't equip him to deal with the milieu into which it sent him—the milieu, so closely connected with Cambridge, that became Bloomsbury? There, at any rate, it seems to me, you have a major critical topic where Forster is concerned. How can so sensitive, decent and generous a mind have allowed itself to be so much *of* a milieu so inferior?—so provincially complacent and petty?

But Mr. Trilling seems to take Bloomsbury at its own valuation (and one has an unhappy suspicion that he is a not unrepresentative American intellectual in this). He guilelessly quotes (p. 32):

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'Mr. Connolly finds Forster the innovator of the diction used by Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, David Garnett and Elizabeth Bowen, a statement which is not at variance with his previous remark that one of the reasons why Forster's work still remains fresh is that "his style has not been imitated".'

Mr. Trilling has clearly no suspicion that the reasons for such a collocation of names may not be primarily critical, and that (to use a fashionable word) a little sociology might, for an American public, have been enlightening here. But even *The New Republic* seems to show the same innocence, and to contact British culture exclusively and trustfully through that Axis which, owing so much of its cohesive strength to the benefactions of the royal saint, controls our currency of reputations from the metropolitan centre.

Mr. Trilling's own dealings with Forster's prose are not adequately critical. He doesn't seem to see the disconcerting nature of the inequalities which should have been enough to advert him against taking the palpable intention for achievement, the thing too vaguely aimed at for the thing grasped, so that he can pronounce *Howards End* 'undoubtedly Forster's masterpiece'. Actually it seems to me the most patently *manqué*, as it is the most ambitious of the 'pre-war' novels. To be able not to mind the almost adolescent poeticality into which the book lapses in the interests of Significance does seem to me strange. It is not, perhaps, so strange that an American should have been less disconcerted than an Englishman by the unreality of Leonard Bast, the clerk.

But the weakness represented by the following is not specifically American: 'It was a good time for intelligence . . . If we look at some of the great books published between 1902 and 1906—Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*, Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy*, William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Henry James's *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors* and *The Golden Bowl*, Shaw's *Man and Superman*, Hardy's *The Dynasts*—we find that great intelligence is common to them all . . .'.

F. R. LEAVIS.

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THE AGE OF YEATS OR THE AGE OF ELIOT?

NOTES ON RECENT VERSE.

POETRY: LONDON, Vol. 2, No. 9 (*Nicolson and Watson*, 2/-).
POETRY: SCOTLAND, 1 (*Maclellan*, 4/-).
ALWAYS ADAM, by Sean Jennett (*Faber*, 6/-).
THE MOTIONLESS DANCER, by Peter Yates (*Chatto and Windus*, 5/-).
THE CRUEL SOLSTICE, by Sidney Keyes (*Routledge*, 5/-).
THE MIDDLE OF A WAR, by Roy Fuller (*Hogarth Press*, 3/6).
A LOST SEASON, by Roy Fuller (*Hogarth Press*, 3/6).
POEMS, 1937-1942, *by David Gascoyne* (*Nicholson and Watson*, 8/-).
PERSON, PLACE AND THING, by Karl J. Shapiro (*Secker and Warburg*, 6/-).
THIRTY-TWO POEMS, by Kenneth Gee (*Fortune Press*, 6/-).
THE INWARD ANIMAL, by Terence Tiller (*Hogarth Press*, 3/6).

Many people have noted the diversity of contemporary verse and the absence of a dominating style such as existed in the 'Thirties, when, whatever Left Wing poets and critics might say, Mr. Eliot's explorations and achievement had manifestly made possible a large part of what successful new verse there was. At the end of 1943 *The Listener* printed a poem which is clearly indebted to Mr. Eliot's later manner:

> There are always those who watch the land from the sea,
> Tapping a foot resignedly upon the boat-deck,
> Who have followed their loves resignedly to their lands
> And may not enter.
>
> 'And if you follow them to their land, you find it
> As they have said, but smaller, and you know it
> Only as a land you will not set foot upon.
> Cornwall is much like Brittany, they have told you,
> But the cliffs stand up in foreignness about you
> And shout their echoes which you cannot catch,
> And the sea explodes on the rocks in a different language'.
>
> It is thus we can hear her speaking at the end of her journey
> And the beginning of her return: Iseult Blanchesmains,
> Looking upon a coast and a foreign castle,
> And valleys not hostile, but their hillsides
> Turning themselves indifferently away . . . Henry Reed.

Thus the hesitant matter-of-fact language leads us back from a contemporary scene to deeper implications. I think the poem is a success. Mr. Pound provided a start for certain other poets of

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rather different temperament. Mr. Bottrall has been the principal writer in this style and his recent sequence in *Scrutiny* is the most accomplished essay in the Pound manner—and in any case it is highly accomplished verse—that I know. The poetic disciples and derivatives of the 'Thirties have now become the masters, before they have reached poetic maturity in most cases, and the resulting confusion is obvious. We are in the second generation away from genius, in a period of prolonged experimentation. Literature lives by experiment, but, just as we are told that successful scientific research is only carried out within the frame of a guiding hypothesis, so the poet needs some creative purpose or critical presuppositions. Neither the contemporary political creeds nor the actual daily round of life nor current literary standards provide these. We have the standards, but they aren't operative. The above account is oversimplified at one point; a very important influence has now entered the poetic world, that of W. B. Yeats's later work. But even genius of his order has not had an invigorating or disciplinary effect. A remark in Mr. W. H. Auden's elegy on him is probably relevant:

> You were silly like us.

Those who cultivate any esoteric vision or 'ism, or merely melodious language, tend to look to Yeats as a kindred spirit whereas Mr. Eliot, as Mr. Forster pointed out recently in a broadcast on Yeats, holds a truly central position in the English tradition. But Yeats's tone and his symbols were his own. He might fool with his heroes and his gyres himself—and he could sometimes sink to absurdity without intentional wit—but no one else has mastered his poise; after all it was a life's achievement. Imitators seem affected or else solemnly provincial, for example Mr. Peter Yates in the name poem of the volume under review—

> Skirting the fringe they move
> Like frail articulate birds,
> Lovers creating their words
> To arrest the darkening flood:
> Calm on their wave of desire,
> The fingers playing with fire
> Deny what living will prove.

—where a highly individual Yeats image seems out of place and one also wonders about the relation between the wave and the flood; or Mr. Sean Jennett whose cultivated efforts to understand and explain life lack force and distinction:

> So while I wander in this silly world,
> with all men preaching, while I try and try
> to mould my days into a little pat,
> and fix and grasp them, the tall gods grow wild
> and circle round me: 'Fool!' they cry,
> 'to hell with thee if thou believest not!'

There is something small about it, though one may be expecting too much if one contrasts it with:

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The best lack all conviction and the worst
Are full of passionate extremity.

Mr. Yates is nearer to Yeats than to any other older poet. He has an imaginative conception of life—based, I take it, on the relation of 'the mackerel-crowded seas' to 'the monuments of unaging intellect'—in which he tries to order his emotions. But only Yeats could have attempted to go any further from there. Mr. Yates really harks back to the early Yeats and the Symbolists; he is uncertain of himself and his heightened style conveys a feverish excitement. The following from *The Impure Rose* will illustrate:

O haunt the gullies and the twisting drains
Immeasurable; move with your glorious
Unrest the weeping elegies and marble deaths
Delectable; leave in the spacious wards
The living words, the plants' virility.

* * * *

Again the fascinating impure rose
Grows out of life into the world.

I think that the subtlety implied in lines 2 and 3 is more apparent than real. The sequence: *Glorious, weeping, delectable, fascinating, impure,* reminds one of the cults of the 'Nineties. *When Winter Birds have risen* states an opposite attitude which calls to mind *fin de siècle* religiosity:

When Winter's birds have risen
From landscape white and level,
The beating heart seems frozen;
The bone escapes its prison,
And in the skull's white angle
Awaits the hidden angel

Yet bone will never blossom
Through blood's too human passion,
Or heart's reversing anger
Of tears when eyelids glisten:
While sense remains still eager
The rags of flesh will linger.

The rhythms are stiff and nervy. Mr. Yates jumps back and forth between 'tremulous hearts' and a 'haunting nil'. It is an old romantic dichotomy. One feels doubtful about future development.

Where folds the central lotus
Flesh and soul could never seek?
Under what black-scarr'd mountain
May Pallas with Adonis meet?

* * * *

By what chicanery of time
May sword and sheath be separated?
Silent be the singer who thinks of me
And how I was defeated. (*Yeats in Limbo*)

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The late Sidney Keyes, disregarding this, his own imagined warning, produced some quite pleasing work in the Yeats manner. Also his *Death and the Ploughman* are travelling towards a familiar waste land, to which he devotes a whole poem:

> Who is this lady, flirting with the wind,
> Blown like a tangle of dried flowers through the desert?
> This is my lover whom I left
> Alone at evening between the candles—
> White fingers nailed with flame—in an empty house.
>
> * * * *
>
> And we go forth, we go forth together
> And our lank shadows dogging us, scrambling
> Across the raw red stones. (*The Wilderness*)

I don't think that Keyes succeeded in these more ambitious attempts. The much admired *Rome Remember* seems destined to become an anthology piece:

> O when the rain beats with a sound like bells
> Upon your bronze-faced monuments, remember
> This European fretful-fingered rain
> Will turn to swords in the hands of Europe's anger.
> Remember the Nordic snarl and the African sorrow.
>
> The bronze wolf howls when the moon turns red.
> The trolls are massing for their last assault.
> Your dreams are full of claws and scaly faces
> And the Gothic arrow is pointed at your heart.

The admonition has a certain solemnity but, despite the topical theme of the fall of empires, the mass of literary and historical references are not blended into any living experience.

> O hours and watches, O unending summer
> Within the lover's blood and cloudy blooms
> That nightly rise and break about the body—
> These are the currency of dreams and language,
> The uncreated images of truth.
>
> Night's wink is momentary, and dividing
> The coloured shapes of passion which it spawned,
> Night strikes through the membrane to the gristled socket
> And tumbles like a pebble through the skull.

The above from *Uncreated Images* begins rather vaguely ('O hours and watches' and 'Currency of dreams and language') and ends in the vividest image in what is on the whole a successful poem. Quieter poetic meditations such as *Cervières* and *Seascape* are pleasing and *The Kestrels* combines an emotional situation and a description with delicacy and skill.

The war has given rise to a great deal of poetic production and like most of us the poets seem more than a little bewildered. It has not evoked the equals in any mood of the indignation and pity of

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Owen or even Sassoon's simpler mockery and disgust. Bewilderment is a difficult mood to express. Mr. Yates' *1943* consciously looks back to the past and states the present feeling straightforwardly:

> Surely the ancient dead, unregistered, unseen,
> Would smile ironically to see this mad machine
> Which we, the living, oil with such glistening tears
> Again the old and sinister disease appears:
> Daily the crucifixion is anonymous,
> And war's old tools, which time has made ingenious
> Trail like heredity across the continents,
> And carve new epitaphs upon men's monuments.

Mr. Fuller is much less sure of himself. His work comprises impressions of service life with comments and asides, and more deliberate attempts to understand and define in verse his reactions to events, for example:

> Now in the bubble of London whose glass will soon
> Smear in to death, at the still calm hour of four,
> I see the shadows of our lives, the Fates
> We narrowly missed, our possible destiny
> I try to say that love is more solid than
> Our bodies, but I only want you here.
> *I know they created love and that the rest*
> *Is ghosts: war murders love*—I really say.
> But dare I write it to you who have said it
> Always and have no consolation from the ghosts.
> (*Letter to My Wife*)

'Smear' is used elsewhere to suggest the instability of life, but not much is said in the rest of the passage and the author seems to intend far more than he really conveys by 'ghosts'. Mrs. Fuller combines a belief in determination with reliance on personal relationships. In *Soliloquy in an Air Raid* one finds the same mental groping:

> Something was set between the words and the world
> I watched to-night; perhaps the necrotomy
> Of love or the spectre of pretence; a vagueness;
> But murdering their commerce like a tariff.

'Something', 'perhaps', 'a vagueness' are characteristic. For all his earnestness the poet is very little more precise and has very little more to say than the average educated man to whom he wants to give a lead.

In his latest collection Mr. Fuller achieves in one or two poems a vigorous expression of ideas, 'a statement, a summing up, an integration', as he puts it; the ending of *Sadness, Glass, Theory* creates, I think, rather than just tells us about, the deterministic outlook:

> Wait upon
> The sloth of history living through you, and
> You reach at last the day of infinite loss

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Or hear the guns die seditiously to silence.
There is a time when on reality
The vision fits, and sadness, glass and theory
Fuse and, as easily as squadrons clear
The sky, the mass directs its destiny.
The integration is the action, I
Can only scribble on the margin: here
We mourn our dead; here saw strange stars revolving
As the struck ship swayed from the pointed convoy;
Here suffered in the sun, here snow; and strangely
Realized here that out of all the world
Only one other in our life would know us.

Similarly the last three verses of *What is terrible* are precise and rhythmically adequate, for example:

For what is terrible is the obvious
Organization of life: the oiled black gun,
And what it cost, the destruction of Europe by
Its councils; the unending justification
Of that which cannot be justified, what is done.

What's done
To me is done to many. I can see
No ghosts, but only the fearful actual
Lives of my comrades. If the empty whitish
Horror is ever to be flushed and real,
It must be for them and changed by them all.

Probably the best poem in the book is *Night*, one of the best poems under review, a development into a larger meditation of a night-time sense of unreality:

It is the null part of the night,
And I am sick of some intense
Dissociation from the act
Of living, as I wake and fight
Dark with my eyes, and every sense
Slowly preceives its offered fact.

Here the poet has used his rhyme scheme to bring out the slow revival of consciousness; the emphasis falls effectively on key words, 'fight', 'sense' and 'fact'. The cross reference to Hamlet is again well realized, except for the pointless half rhyme:

Hamlet had more diseases than
His age, and felt them when the gun
Was silent and his mother sleeping,
His gnawing for Ophelia thin:
It was the terror in the sun;
His happy body's curious weeping.

The poems about service in Africa which suggested the title don't usually rise above description with comment added on, but I liked

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the first, *In Africa,* in which the exiles

> see for ever
> The cultivated acre of their pain;
> The clouds like dreams,
> Involved, improbable; the endless plain
> Precisely as it seems.

which last is a characteristic image.

Mr. Tiller provides an account of his own poetic outlook as a Foreword. His first poem, *Eclogue for a Dying House* is more obviously indebted to Mr. Eliot than Mr. Fuller's work—many ideas, especially from the *Burnt Norton* sequence are diluted in it. The final poem, *Birth of Christ,* reads more like a rough draft than a finished composition. Between these he writes variously on the idea of the 'inward animal', a personality being born out of the war. He analyses moods of breakdown:

> Deciduous almanacs snow out the year,
> And a cathedral chill is cast
> Over despair and thought and lust:
> hell in the aisles and in the belfry fear.
> The uncertain daffodil of our inordinate pity
> May never bloom again . . . (*Elegy I*)

disillusion:

> I the endurer am the mocker of me.
> One who was music in a silent house:
> under the hammers of this iron sea
> the light arms of love turn tremulous
> and there is no assurance between kisses.
> Oh it is all uncertainty of choice
> as the achievement of the humour passes
> —thought being intangible, having no meaning
> —as after dreams of horrors or embraces
> the acid of the heart bleaches my morning. (*X*)

and expectancy:

> and they had bought no future, but this less
> oh less than strength, this concave watchfulness.

He has more to say than Mr. Fuller, but again one doesn't feel sure that his poems are wholly satisfactory. There are loose ends and a lack of unity; many images don't bear close examination and there is a good deal of rather crude exaggeration.

Along with Mr. Fuller's verse notes on service life I was struck by the contrast between Mr. F. T. Prince's *Soldiers Bathing* and Mr. Scarfe's *Autumn Evening,* both in *Poetry: London.* The two poems are the work of cultivated men contemplating their fellow soldiers:

> The sea at evening marbles the warm sand,
> And on the level beach I watch the movements of a band
> Of soldiers who belong to me. Stripped bare

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For bathing in the sea, they shout and laugh in the soft air.
And all is pathos now. The body that was gross,
Rank, ravenous disgusting, in the act and in repose,
Its fever, filth, and sweat, its bestial strength
And bestial decay, now washed in shadow, grows at length
Fragile and luminous. Poor bare forked animal . . .

Late in the billets, soldiers in shirtsleeves
Sweat after their beer, mournfully singing
In undertones their wild nostalgic songs
Of sexual longing, but so beautiful on their lips
As their ponderous faces cloud, for each is thinking
Of solitary sleep and far beyond their arms
A young wife's breast and honey-breathing child.
I love you, comrades . . .

To me the difference is that between sensitive observation and sentimentality. Mr. Prince's soldiers are just human beings, Mr. Scarfe's are a cross betwen the 'working boys' of Left Wing pastoralism and dumb animals to be patted on the head, both rather embarassing attitudes, to which one would have thought that service experience would have put an end.

Mr. Gee's volume, *Thirty-two Poems*, contains some very interesting work. There are strands from Mr. Eliot, *e.g.*:

Let us go then, you and I,
Among the stricken boroughs by the river,
Past chasms in buildings . . .

and from Mr. Auden and from others, but Mr. Gee's best poems stand on their own feet. He has a gift for striking phrases, but he also has the true imaginative faculty of making the particulars stand for the general and of thinking in related images so that the poem has organic unity, *e.g. The Enemy*:

The enemy is always singular.
He shapes the salient against millions' hearts,
He makes advances over the mind's map, and life parts
From what was known, falling away to dread
Or anger; pleasure, shortened between these and the dead,
Spins like a coin on the shuddering glass of war.

* * * *

The enemy is hunter and saviour too.
His quarry sees him in the ferret eyes
Of thousand faces crowding stairs and rooms, and knows he dies,
The saved and visionary praise him . . . He lies
Still in the closing walls of night, and knows the cries
Murdered and heroes', women's: all are true.

This shows his rhythmic skill and the concentration of thought and feeling. *Waking, And there were other ways, South* and *Delirium* impressed me particularly.

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Mr. Gee's themes are frequently memories of childhood, especially life at the seaside, with its innocence and wonder, and also another nostalgia for a gay pre-war world of continental travel and cosmopolitan art and politics and even war:

> We played up our fantasy of wishes all we knew,
> * * * *
> Admiring the surrealist exhibition, the dream spaces
> Of Salvador Dali, the ruins of Chirico, the gaga faces.
> We mourned once the dead beyond the Pyrenees,
> Hoped that towns would laugh awaking to new living, these
> Dying men and the terrible Goya postures give
> More than an accurate mirror of a future we would not believe.
> We know these moods are only sentimental; lies;
> Now day shudders thinly into evening . . .
>
> (*Good-bye Now*)

He can look back, steadily and recognize the illusions. Fear and its ramifications expressed in nightmare images which do *not* get out of hand, are also a frequent theme, but the most frequent is lies:

> Words are lies and tell the way we live.

He is a vigorous and bitter critic of civilization as he looks back over the past and at the world around him. The forces of nature:

> And dignity still living in the human face.

are his fixed points of value. He does not attempt to go beyond a simple humanist faith. Having

> . . . learned the tricks of evasion, and persuaded time
> To parade before us without the trappings of history,
> While in Europe the hangmen measured the drop
> And prepared the changes on the map.
>
> (*Poem for March, 1940*)

he tries in a number of poems, some good and some less good, to visualize and appreciate the historic moment and to show the war putting a whole epoch in perspective behind a few realities. The first of a sequence of sonnets which appeared in *Horizon*, March, 1943, expressing a spirit of macabre tragedy with touches of satire on human shortsightedness, realizes the final impact of war in a single topical image:

> History's truth always arrives too late.
> Only the dream warns: sway on its tide
> Buoys of terror with their iron-mouthed bells
> That are tolling for those that have already died
> When we awake. Bone bears no tale of pain.
> The ritual drum beats in a stranger's land,
> Makes riding minutes no more urgent yet
> To break the glass down in a rain of sand.
> Only a fathomed question darkens noon's

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Blaze for a moment packed with evil, tells
The way wounds in the olive field grow bright
Like stars, and red runs in among the maize.
And from the headline armies spring real men
Whom the horn blows for and worms take to-night.

The poem moves in and out of nightmare and every image has a wide field of reference, symbolical and actual. The light rhyming pattern gives just sufficient emphasis. The following from *Peace is a Long Way* gathers up many earlier themes and communicates an attitude of confidence towards the future which will stand serious examination:

But we are captives, bound
In the constricting minutes of uncertainty,
For hours blind, between the lost years and to-morrow.
And through the narrow windows on our day,
Over seas that conquer and long wastes
Where bone lies fallen and the body falters,
Daily we look, to hope for waking sun
To return to us the rose, to turn
Into reality the children's shell-trapped echoes.
Only heart and hand will save and gather
Beyond the reefed sea-rim
What the eye sees already in wishing glass or dream
Outdaring daylight. For peace a long way lies beyond
The end of ruin and midnight words of old, mad men,
Far deeper than the children's mines of memory.
And any shell that holds or hides a still world,
Stricter than polar winter is and never
Will flowers of calm be melted from such a cage
By eloquence alone. Only words that change
Into a vision the blood's spent tide will rise for
And conquer old terrors in the vein, will make
Earth a place where man walks free.

One feels the effort to achieve this attitude in the rhythms and one feels that the poem is alive as a whole and in its parts. It is extremely good contemporary verse, which does not preach any doctrine but obviously expresses a mature and humane consciousness. The last two quotations show steady improvement in organization and expressive detail.

With Mr. Gascoyne's work (it was reviewed in the last number of *Scrutiny*) one comes back to the more lyrical manner. He seems to be intent on restoring 'the sublime in the old sense'. I do not know whether he is connected with the New Apocalypse group who fill a good part of *Poetry: London* and *Poetry: Scotland*, but many of his poems are decidedly visionary and ill-organized. He writes with a dissociated sensibility. Mr. Eliot's example and the criticism of the last twenty years have had no effect. I'm not demanding that all poets should try to write like Mr. Eliot, but neglect of the ideas about English poetry that he formulated has been fatal to Mr. Gascoyne. He writes a poetry of worked up aspirations, a kind

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of rhetoric, which is different from the straightforward didactic rhetoric of Mr. MacDiarmid. He doesn't achieve, as he desires in *Apologia*:

> A single poem with my mental eye
> Wide open.

By contrast with most of his British contemporaries I am struck by Mr. Shapiro's accomplishment. I gather that this is his first published volume, but his verse is neat and compact, without trailing words and half-expressed feelings. He is not very subtle but his surface is smooth and polished. Take for example *Necropolis:*

> Even in death they prosper; even in death
> Where lust lies senseless and pride fallow
> The mouldering owners of rents and labor
> Prosper and improve the high hill.
>
> For theirs is the stone whose name is deepest cut;
> Theirs the facsimile temple, theirs
> The iron acanthus and the hackneyed Latin,
> The boxwood rows and all the birds.

One can see the Anglo-American ancestry of this but it isn't mere pastiche. It is precise and sophisticated journalism in verse—Mr. Auden was never so precise and his sophistication, even though it ascends to macabre socio-psychological fantasy of an originality which Mr. Shapiro never touches, also descends to triviality and irresponsibility. Mr. Shapoir maintains a steady level. It is the Dos Passos world; *Buick, October 1, Conscription Camp, Emporium, Haircut, Elegy on a Front Porch, Druid Hill Park* and *Poet* all discuss critically aspects of the contemporary scene. Mr. Shapiro doesn't look for 'significance' like the other poets and seem to fumble with his words when he can't find it. His poetry is of the surface:

> O can we understand it? Is it ours,
> A crude whim of a beginning people,
> A private orgy in a secluded spot?
> Or alien like the word *harem,* or true
> Like hideous Pittsburgh or depraved Atlanta?
> Is adolescence just as vile
> As this its architecture and its talk? (*Hollywood*)

Usually it is the disgust and bitter humour of the intelligent man, given point and force. In *To Evelyn for Christmas,* a pleasing greeting to the dedicatee of the volume, he writes:

> For Anno Domini, for the year of War
> Hardness I give, a drop of medicine,
> A tear to take which on your tender tongue
> May be the poison or the dram of strength.

I don't think it entirely derogatory to call Mr. Shapiro well-boiled. This is one's reaction after reading the skilfully thought out *Love Poem,* beginning:

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Attempted suicide was your tour de force
Against defeat, a promissory curse,
An act of nakedness, your first attempt,
The most vital, an earnest stroke of luck;

or *Israfel* which satirises a famous poet and his school:

And clammy virgins. What else were his codes
But diagrams of hideouts of the mind
Plugged up with corpses and expensive junk,
Prosopopoeia to keep himself at bay?
Think of him as a cicerone with data
False as a waxworks and that understood
Ask pitifully for pain. Or think that now
Four cities claim him as France recommended;

and the last of *Six Religious Lyrics* ends on a quieter, but rather blasé, version of Housman's famous epitaph:

Inviolable and sacred mass,
You were not good but good enough,
You nodded at your destinies,
The last and next-to-last rebuff.

Nation and race and family
Have built on many a smoking town;
Samson was also slightly blind
But brought the roof of Dagon down.

Such are my impressions of a miscellaneous collection of recent poetry. I do not know whether it is truly representative, but from it I have tried to sort out the main trends and suggest the respective merits of different poets. In general one can say that the reflective analytical manner, its rhythms based on those of speech and its material mostly drawn from contemporary life, produces happier results than the lyrical manner derived from Yeats. No one else is capable of his mysterious exaltation and the sardonic twists given by his powerful mind. Similarly no one else reaches Mr. Eliot's own subtlety of particular realization and his solemn grandeur—there are big differences of outlook and temperament, let alone imaginative power. Direct expression of feeling in poetry ought to be made possible again. This is not easy starting from the extremely self-conscious contemporary idiom, which is perhaps why some poets have abandoned all self-consciousness and self-criticism and poured out their hearts and other internal organs so indiscriminately. The critic cannot make any prescription for good poetry, he can only try to judge results; but one may suggest that, as the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries show, it is very difficult to write well—though, no doubt, easier to write—with the critical intellect in abeyance. In the last few years very few poets have really added anything to the tradition. The desire to write seems as strong as ever and poets can only go on experimenting. I'm afraid that one must add that many people mistake the desire to write for inspiration.

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